





Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2022 with funding from  
Kahle/Austin Foundation











THE  
DIARY OF A MAN OF FIFTY  
A NEW ENGLAND WINTER  
THE PATH OF DUTY  
AND OTHER TALES



MACMILLAN AND CO., Limited  
LONDON • BOMBAY • CALCUTTA • MADRAS  
MELBOURNE

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

NEW YORK • BOSTON • CHICAGO  
DALLAS • SAN FRANCISCO

THE MACMILLAN CO. OF CANADA, LTD.  
TORONTO

THE DIARY  
OF A MAN OF FIFTY  
A NEW ENGLAND WINTER  
THE PATH OF DUTY  
AND OTHER TALES

BY

HENRY JAMES

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED  
ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON

1923

STACK

1205-5My36

J239

19

COPYRIGHT

WASSEL CLUB  
2000 3000000

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

C.W.

## NOTE

OF the stories contained in this volume, none of which appeared in the "New York" edition, the first is taken from *The Madonna of the Future, and Other Tales*, 1879, the second from *Tales of Three Cities*, 1884. The rest are from *Stories Revived*, 1885. Four of these last (*A Day of Days*, *A Light Man*, *A Landscape-Painter*, *Poor Richard*) were written at a much earlier time; they were first published in American magazines between 1866 and 1869.

P. L.





# CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE DIARY OF A MAN OF FIFTY . . . . .	I
A NEW ENGLAND WINTER . . . . .	43
THE PATH OF DUTY . . . . .	123
A DAY OF DAYS . . . . .	177
A LIGHT MAN . . . . .	209
GEORGINA'S REASONS . . . . .	251
A LANDSCAPE-PAINTER . . . . .	341
ROSE-AGATHE . . . . .	389
POOR RICHARD . . . . .	415



THE DIARY  
OF A MAN OF FIFTY



FLORENCE, *April* 5, 1874.—They told me I should find Italy greatly changed ; and in seven-and-twenty years there is room for changes. But to me everything is so perfectly the same that I seem to be living my youth over again ; all the forgotten impressions of that enchanting time come back to me. At the moment they were powerful enough ; but they afterwards faded away. What in the world became of them ? What ever becomes of such things, in the long intervals of consciousness ? Where do they hide themselves away ? in what unvisited cupboards and crannies of our being do they preserve themselves ? They are like the lines of a letter written in sympathetic ink ; hold the letter to the fire for a while and the grateful warmth brings out the invisible words. It is the warmth of this yellow sun of Florence that has been restoring the text of my own young romance ; the thing has been lying before me to-day as a clear, fresh page. There have been moments during the last ten years when I have felt so portentously old, so fagged and finished, that I should have taken as a very bad joke any intimation that this present sense of juvenility was still in store for me. It won't last at any rate ; so I had better make the best of it. But I confess it surprises me. I have led too serious a life ; but that perhaps, after all, preserves one's youth. At all events, I have travelled too far, I have worked too hard, I have lived in brutal climates and associated with tiresome

## THE DIARY OF A MAN OF FIFTY

people. When a man has reached his fifty-second year without being, materially, the worse for wear—when he has fair health, a fair fortune, a tidy conscience and a complete exemption from embarrassing relatives—I suppose he is bound, in delicacy, to write himself happy. But I confess I shirk this obligation. I have not been miserable; I won't go so far as to say that—or at least as to write it. But happiness—positive happiness—would have been something different. I don't know that it would have been better, by all measurements—that it would have left me better off at the present time. But it certainly would have made this difference—that I should not have been reduced, in pursuit of pleasant images, to disinter a buried episode of more than a quarter of a century ago. I should have found entertainment more—what shall I call it?—more contemporaneous. I should have had a wife and children, and I should not be in the way of making, as the French say, infidelities to the present. Of course it's a great gain to have had an escape, not to have committed an act of thumping folly; and I suppose that, whatever serious step one might have taken at twenty-five, after a struggle, and with a violent effort, and however one's conduct might appear to be justified by events, there would always remain a certain element of regret; a certain sense of loss lurking in the sense of gain; a tendency to wonder, rather wishfully, what *might* have been. What might have been, in this case, would, without doubt, have been very sad, and what has been has been very cheerful and comfortable; but there are nevertheless two or three questions I might ask myself. Why, for instance, have I never married—why have I never been able to care for any woman as I cared for that one? Ah, why are the mountains blue and why is the sunshine warm? Happiness miti-

## THE DIARY OF A MAN OF FIFTY

gated by impertinent conjectures—that's about my ticket.

6th.—I knew it wouldn't last ; it's already passing away. But I have spent a delightful day ; I have been strolling all over the place. Everything reminds me of something else, and yet of itself at the same time ; my imagination makes a great circuit and comes back to the starting-point. There is that well-remembered odour of spring in the air, and the flowers, as they used to be, are gathered into great sheaves and stacks, all along the rugged base of the Strozzi Palace. I wandered for an hour in the Boboli Gardens ; we went there several times together. I remember all those days individually ; they seem to me as yesterday. I found the corner where she always chose to sit—the bench of sun-warmed marble, in front of the screen of ilex, with that exuberant statue of Pomona just beside it. The place is exactly the same, except that poor Pomona has lost one of her tapering fingers. I sat there for half an hour, and it was strange how near to me she seemed. The place was perfectly empty—that is, it was filled with *her*. I closed my eyes and listened ; I could almost hear the rustle of her dress on the gravel. Why do we make such an ado about death ? What is it after all but a sort of refinement of life ? She died ten years ago, and yet, as I sat there in the sunny stillness, she was a palpable, audible presence. I went afterwards into the gallery of the palace, and wandered for an hour from room to room. The same great pictures hung in the same places and the same dark frescoes arched above them. Twice, of old, I went there with her ; she had a great understanding of art. She understood all sorts of things. Before the Madonna of the Chair I stood a long time. The face is not a particle like hers, and yet it reminded me of her. But everything does that. We stood

and looked at it together once for half an hour ; I remember perfectly what she said.

8th.—Yesterday I felt blue—blue and bored ; and when I got up this morning I had half a mind to leave Florence. But I went out into the street, beside the Arno, and looked up and down—looked at the yellow river and the violet hills, and then decided to remain—or rather, I decided nothing. I simply stood gazing at the beauty of Florence, and before I had gazed my fill I was in good-humour again, and it was too late to start for Rome. I strolled along the quay, where something presently happened that rewarded me for staying. I stopped in front of a little jeweller's shop, where a great many objects in mosaic were exposed in the window ; I stood there for some minutes—I don't know why, for I have no taste for mosaic. In a moment a little girl came and stood beside me—a little girl with a frowsy Italian head, carrying a basket. I turned away, but, as I turned, my eyes happened to fall on her basket. It was covered with a napkin, and on the napkin was pinned a piece of paper, inscribed with an address. This address caught my glance—there was a name on it I knew. It was very legibly written—evidently by a scribe who had made up in zeal what was lacking in skill. *Contessa Salvi-Scarabelli, Via Ghibellina*—so ran the superscription ; I looked at it for some moments ; it caused me a sudden emotion. Presently the little girl, becoming aware of my attention, glanced up at me, wondering, with a pair of timid brown eyes.

“ Are you carrying your basket to the Countess Salvi ? ” I asked.

The child stared at me. “ To the Countess Scarabelli.”

“ Do you know the Countess ? ”



## THE DIARY OF A MAN OF FIFTY

"Know her?" murmured the child, with an air of small dismay.

"I mean, have you seen her?"

"Yes, I have seen her." And then, in a moment, with a sudden soft smile—" *E bella!* " said the little girl. She was beautiful herself as she said it.

"Precisely; and is she fair or dark?"

The child kept gazing at me. "*Bionda—bionda,*" she answered, looking about into the golden sunshine for a comparison.

"And is she young?"

"She is not young—like me. But she is not old like—like——"

"Like me, eh? And is she married?"

The little girl began to look wise. "I have never seen the Signor Conte."

"And she lives in Via Ghibellina?"

"*Sicuro.* In a beautiful palace."

I had one more question to ask, and I pointed it with certain copper coins. "Tell me a little—is she good?"

The child inspected a moment the contents of her little brown fist. "It's you who are good," she answered.

"Ah, but the Countess?" I repeated.

My informant lowered her big brown eyes, with an air of conscientious meditation that was inexpressibly quaint. "To me she appears so," she said at last, looking up.

"Ah, then she must be so," I said, "because, for your age, you are very intelligent." And having delivered myself of this compliment I walked away and left the little girl counting her *soldi*.

I walked back to the hotel, wondering how I could learn something about the Contessa Salvi-Scarabelli. In the doorway I found the innkeeper, and near him stood a young man whom I immediately perceived

## THE DIARY OF A MAN OF FIFTY

to be a compatriot and with whom, apparently, he had been in conversation.

"I wonder whether you can give me a piece of information," I said to the landlord. "Do you know anything about the Count Salvi-Scarabelli?"

The landlord looked down at his boots, then slowly raised his shoulders, with a melancholy smile. "I have many regrets, dear sir——"

"You don't know the name?"

"I know the name, assuredly. But I don't know the gentleman."

I saw that my question had attracted the attention of the young Englishman, who looked at me with a good deal of earnestness. He was apparently satisfied with what he saw, for he presently decided to speak.

"The Count Scarabelli is dead," he said, very gravely.

I looked at him a moment; he was a pleasing young fellow. "And his widow lives," I observed, "in Via Ghibellina?"

"I daresay that is the name of the street." He was a handsome young Englishman, but he was also an awkward one; he wondered who I was and what I wanted, and he did me the honour to perceive that, as regards these points, my appearance was reassuring. But he hesitated, very properly, to talk with a perfect stranger about a lady whom he knew, and he had not the art to conceal his hesitation. I instantly felt it to be singular that though he regarded me as a perfect stranger, I had not the same feeling about him. Whether it was that I had seen him before, or simply that I was struck with his agreeable young face—at any rate I felt myself, as they say here, in sympathy with him. If I have seen him before I don't remember the occasion, and neither, apparently, does he; I

## THE DIARY OF A MAN OF FIFTY

suppose it's only a part of the feeling I have had the last three days about everything. It was this feeling that made me suddenly act as if I had known him a long time.

"Do you know the Countess Salvi?" I asked.

He looked at me a little, and then, without resenting the freedom of my question—"The Countess Scarabelli you mean," he said.

"Yes," I answered; "she's the daughter."

"The daughter is a little girl."

"She must be grown up now. She must be—let me see—close upon thirty."

My young Englishman began to smile. "Of whom are you speaking?"

"I was speaking of the daughter," I said, understanding his smile. "But I was thinking of the mother."

"Of the mother?"

"Of a person I knew twenty-seven years ago—the most charming woman I have ever known. She was the Countess Salvi—she lived in a wonderful old house in Via Ghibellina."

"A wonderful old house!" my young Englishman repeated.

"She had a little girl," I went on; "and the little girl was very fair, like her mother; and the mother and daughter had the same name—Bianca." I stopped and looked at my companion, and he blushed a little. "And Bianca Salvi," I continued, "was the most charming woman in the world." He blushed a little more, and I laid my hand on his shoulder. "Do you know why I tell you this? Because you remind me of what I was when I knew her—when I loved her." My poor young Englishman gazed at me with a sort of embarrassed and fascinated stare, and still I went on. "I say that's the reason I told you this—but you'll think it a

## THE DIARY OF A MAN OF FIFTY

strange reason. You remind me of my younger self. You needn't resent that—I was a charming young fellow. The Countess Salvi thought so. Her daughter thinks the same of you."

Instantly, instinctively he raised his hand to my arm. "Truly?"

"Ah, you are wonderfully like me!" I said, laughing. "That was just my state of mind. I wanted tremendously to please her." He dropped his hand and looked away, smiling, but with an air of ingenuous confusion which quickened my interest in him. "You don't know what to make of me," I pursued. "You don't know why a stranger should suddenly address you in this way and pretend to read your thoughts. Doubtless you think me a little cracked. Perhaps I am eccentric; but it's not so bad as that. I have lived about the world a great deal, following my profession, which is that of a soldier. I have been in India, in Africa, in Canada, and I have lived a good deal alone. That inclines people, I think, to sudden bursts of confidence. A week ago I came into Italy, where I spent six months when I was your age. I came straight to Florence—I was eager to see it again, on account of associations. They have been crowding upon me ever so thickly. I have taken the liberty of giving you a hint of them." The young man inclined himself a little, in silence, as if he had been struck with a sudden respect. He stood and looked away for a moment at the river and the mountains. "It's very beautiful," I said.

"Oh, it's enchanting," he murmured.

"That's the way I used to talk. But that's nothing to you."

He glanced at me again. "On the contrary, I like to hear."

"Well, then, let us take a walk. If you too are

## THE DIARY OF A MAN OF FIFTY

staying at this inn, we are fellow-travellers. We will walk down the Arno to the Cascine. There are several things I should like to ask of you."

My young Englishman assented with an air of almost filial confidence, and we strolled for an hour beside the river and through the shady alleys of that lovely wilderness. We had a great deal of talk: it's not only myself, it's my whole situation over again.

"Are you very fond of Italy?" I asked.

He hesitated a moment. "One can't express that."

"Just so; I couldn't express it. I used to try—I used to write verses. On the subject of Italy I was very ridiculous."

"So am I ridiculous," said my companion.

"No, my dear boy," I answered, "we are not ridiculous; we are two very reasonable, superior people."

"The first time one comes—as I have done—it's a revelation."

"Oh, I remember well; one never forgets it. It's an introduction to beauty."

"And it must be a great pleasure," said my young friend, "to come back."

"Yes, fortunately the beauty is always here. What form of it," I asked, "do you prefer?"

My companion looked a little mystified; and at last he said, "I am very fond of the pictures."

"So was I. And among the pictures, which do you like best?"

"Oh, a great many."

"So did I; but I had certain favourites."

Again the young man hesitated a little, and then he confessed that the group of painters he preferred on the whole to all others was that of the early Florentines.

I was so struck with this that I stopped short.

## THE DIARY OF A MAN OF FIFTY

"That was exactly my taste!" And then I passed my hand into his arm and we went our way again.

We sat down on an old stone bench in the Cascine, and a solemn blank-eyed Hermes, with wrinkles accentuated by the dust of ages, stood above us and listened to our talk.

"The Countess Salvi died ten years ago," I said.

My companion admitted that he had heard her daughter say so.

"After I knew her she married again," I added. "The Count Salvi died before I knew her—a couple of years after their marriage."

"Yes, I have heard that."

"And what else have you heard?"

My companion stared at me; he had evidently heard nothing.

"She was a very interesting woman—there are a great many things to be said about her. Later, perhaps, I will tell you. Has the daughter the same charm?"

"You forget," said my young man, smiling, "that I have never seen the mother."

"Very true. I keep confounding. But the daughter—how long have you known her?"

"Only since I have been here. A very short time."

"A week?"

For a moment he said nothing. "A month."

"That's just the answer I should have made. A week, a month—it was all the same to me."

"I think it is more than a month," said the young man.

"It's probably six. How did you make her acquaintance?"

"By a letter—an introduction given me by a friend in England."

"The analogy is complete," I said. "But the friend who gave me my letter to Madame de Salvi died many years ago. He, too, admired her greatly. I don't know why it never came into my mind that her daughter might be living in Florence. Somehow I took for granted it was all over. I never thought of the little girl; I never heard what had become of her. I walked past the palace yesterday and saw that it was occupied; but I took for granted it had changed hands."

"The Countess Scarabelli," said my friend, "brought it to her husband as her marriage-portion."

"I hope he appreciated it! There is a fountain in the court, and there is a charming old garden beyond it. The Countess's sitting-room looks into that garden. The staircase is of white marble, and there is a medallion by Luca della Robbia set into the wall at the place where it makes a bend. Before you come into the drawing-room you stand a moment in a great vaulted place hung round with faded tapestry, paved with bare tiles, and furnished only with three chairs. In the drawing-room, above the fireplace, is a superb Andrea del Sarto. The furniture is covered with pale sea-green."

My companion listened to all this.

"The Andrea del Sarto is there; it's magnificent. But the furniture is in pale red."

"Ah, they have changed it then—in twenty-seven years."

"And there's a portrait of Madame de Salvi," continued my friend.

I was silent a moment. "I should like to see that."

He too was silent. Then he asked, "Why don't you go and see it? If you knew the mother so well, why don't you call upon the daughter?"

"From what you tell me I am afraid."



## THE DIARY OF A MAN OF FIFTY

"What have I told you to make you afraid?"

I looked a little at his ingenuous countenance.  
"The mother was a very dangerous woman."

The young Englishman began to blush again.  
"The daughter is not," he said.

"Are you very sure?"

He didn't say he was sure, but he presently inquired in what way the Countess Salvi had been dangerous.

"You must not ask me that," I answered; "for, after all, I desire to remember only what was good in her." And as we walked back I begged him to render me the service of mentioning my name to his friend, and of saying that I had known her mother well and that I asked permission to come and see her.

9th.—I have seen that poor boy half-a-dozen times again, and a most amiable young fellow he is. He continues to represent to me, in the most extraordinary manner, my own young identity; the correspondence is perfect at all points, save that he is a better boy than I. He is evidently acutely interested in his Countess, and leads quite the same life with her that I led with Madame de Salvi. He goes to see her every evening and stays half the night; these Florentines keep the most extraordinary hours. I remember, towards 3 A.M., Madame de Salvi used to turn me out. "Come, come," she would say, "it's time to go. If you were to stay later people might talk." I don't know at what time he comes home, but I suppose his evening seems as short as mine did. To-day he brought me a message from his Contessa—a very gracious little speech. She remembered often to have heard her mother speak of me—she called me her English friend. All her mother's friends were dear to her, and she begged I would do her the honour to come and see her. She is always at home of an evening. Poor young Stanmer (he



is of the Devonshire Stanmers—a great property) reported this speech verbatim, and of course it can't in the least signify to him that a poor grizzled, battered soldier, old enough to be his father, should come to call upon his *innamorata*. But I remember how it used to matter to me when other men came ; that's a point of difference. However, it's only because I'm so old. At twenty-five I shouldn't have been afraid of myself at fifty-two. Camerino was thirty-four—and then the others ! She was always at home in the evening, and they all used to come. They were old Florentine names. But she used to let me stay after them all ; she thought an old English name as good. What a transcendent coquette ! . . . But *basta così*, as she used to say. I meant to go to-night to Casa Salvi, but I couldn't bring myself to the point. I don't know what I'm afraid of ; I used to be in a hurry enough to go there once. I suppose I am afraid of the very look of the place—of the old rooms, the old walls. I shall go to-morrow night. I am afraid of the very echoes.

10th.—She has the most extraordinary resemblance to her mother. When I went in I was tremendously startled ; I stood staring at her. I have just come home ; it is past midnight ; I have been all the evening at Casa Salvi. It is very warm—my window is open—I can look out on the river, gliding past in the starlight. So, of old, when I came home, I used to stand and look out. There are the same cypresses on the opposite hills.

Poor young Stanmer was there, and three or four other admirers ; they all got up when I came in. I think I had been talked about, and there was some curiosity. But why should I have been talked about ? They were all youngish men—none of them of my time. She is a wonderful likeness of her mother ; I couldn't get over it. Beautiful like her mother, and yet with

## THE DIARY OF A MAN OF FIFTY

the same faults in her face ; but with her mother's perfect head and brow and sympathetic, almost pitying, eyes. Her face has just that peculiarity of her mother's, which, of all human countenances that I have ever known, was the one that passed most quickly and completely from the expression of gaiety to that of repose. Repose, in her face, always suggested sadness ; and while you were watching it with a kind of awe, and wondering of what tragic secret it was the token, it kindled, on the instant, into a radiant Italian smile. The Countess Scarambelli's smiles to-night, however, were almost uninterrupted. She greeted me—divinely, as her mother used to do ; and young Stanmer sat in the corner of the sofa—as I used to do—and watched her while she talked. She is thin and very fair, and was dressed in light, vaporous black : that completes the resemblance. The house, the rooms, are almost absolutely the same ; there may be changes of detail, but they don't modify the general effect. There are the same precious pictures on the walls of the salon—the same great dusky fresco in the concave ceiling. The daughter is not rich, I suppose, any more than the mother. The furniture is worn and faded, and I was admitted by a solitary servant who carried a twinkling taper before me up the great dark marble staircase.

“ I have often heard of you,” said the Countess, as I sat down near her ; “ my mother often spoke of you.”

“ Often ? ” I answered. “ I am surprised at that.”

“ Why are you surprised ? Were you not good friends ? ”

“ Yes, for a certain time—very good friends. But I was sure she had forgotten me.”

“ She never forgot,” said the Countess, looking at me intently and smiling. “ She was not like that.”

"She was not like most other women in any way," I declared.

"Ah, she was charming," cried the Countess, rattling open her fan. "I have always been very curious to see you. I have received an impression of you."

"A good one, I hope."

She looked at me, laughing, and not answering this: it was just her mother's trick.

"My Englishman," she used to call you—'*il mio inglese*.'"

"I hope she spoke of me kindly," I insisted.

The Countess, still laughing, gave a little shrug, balancing her hand to and fro. "So-so; I always supposed you had had a quarrel. You don't mind my being frank like this—eh?"

"I delight in it; it reminds me of your mother."

"Every one tells me that. But I am not clever like her. You will see for yourself."

"That speech," I said, "completes the resemblance. She was always pretending she was not clever, and in reality——"

"In reality she was an angel, eh? To escape from dangerous comparisons I will admit then that I am clever. That will make a difference. But let us talk of you. You are very—how shall I say it?—very eccentric."

"Is that what your mother told you?"

"To tell the truth, she spoke of you as a great original. But aren't all Englishmen eccentric? All except that one!" and the Countess pointed to poor Stanmer, in his corner of the sofa.

"Oh, I know just what he is," I said.

"He's as quiet as a lamb—he's like all the world," cried the Countess.

"Like all the world—yes. He is in love with you."

## THE DIARY OF A MAN OF FIFTY

She looked at me with sudden gravity. "I don't object to your saying that for all the world—but I do for him."

"Well," I went on, "he is peculiar in this: he is rather afraid of you."

Instantly she began to smile; she turned her face toward Stanmer. He had seen that we were talking about him; he coloured and got up—then came toward us.

"I like men who are afraid of nothing," said our hostess.

"I know what you want," I said to Stanmer. "You want to know what the Signora Contessa says about you."

Stanmer looked straight into her face, very gravely. "I don't care a straw what she says."

"You are almost a match for the Signora Contessa," I answered. "She declares she doesn't care a pin's head what you think."

"I recognise the Countess's style!" Stanmer exclaimed, turning away.

"One would think," said the Countess, "that you were trying to make a quarrel between us."

I watched him move away to another part of the great saloon; he stood in front of the *Andrea del Sarto*, looking up at it. But he was not seeing it; he was listening to what we might say. I often stood there in just that way. "He can't quarrel with you, any more than I could have quarrelled with your mother."

"Ah, but you did. Something painful passed between you."

"Yes, it was painful, but it was not a quarrel. I went away one day and never saw her again. That was all."

The Countess looked at me gravely. "What do you call it when a man does that?"

THE DIARY OF A MAN OF FIFTY

"It depends upon the case."

"Sometimes," said the Countess in French, "it's a *lâcheté*."

"Yes, and sometimes, it's an act of wisdom."

"And sometimes," rejoined the Countess, "it's a mistake."

I shook my head. "For me it was no mistake."

She began to laugh again. "Caro Signore, you're a great original. What had my poor mother done to you?"

I looked at our young Englishman, who still had his back turned to us and was staring up at the picture. "I will tell you some other time," I said.

"I shall certainly remind you; I am very curious to know." Then she opened and shut her fan two or three times, still looking at me. What eyes they have! "Tell me a little," she went on, "if I may ask without indiscretion. Are you married?"

"No, Signora Contessa."

"Isn't that at least a mistake?"

"Do I look very unhappy?"

She dropped her head a little to one side. "For an Englishman—no!"

"Ah," said I, laughing, "you are quite as clever as your mother."

"And they tell me that you are a great soldier," she continued; "you have lived in India. It was very kind of you, so far away, to have remembered our poor dear Italy."

"One always remembers Italy; the distance makes no difference. I remembered it well the day I heard of your mother's death!"

"Ah, that was a sorrow!" said the Countess. "There's not a day that I don't weep for her. But *che vuole?* She's a saint in paradise."

"*Sicuro*," I answered; and I looked some time at the ground. "But tell me about yourself, dear lady,"

## THE DIARY OF A MAN OF FIFTY

I asked at last, raising my eyes. "You have also had the sorrow of losing your husband."

"I am a poor widow, as you see. *Che vuole?* My husband died after three years of marriage."

I waited for her to remark that the late Count Scarabelli was also a saint in paradise, but I waited in vain.

"That was like your distinguished father," I said.

"Yes, he too died young. I can't be said to have known him; I was but of the age of my own little girl. But I weep for him all the more."

Again I was silent for a moment.

"It was in India too," I said presently, "that I heard of your mother's second marriage."

The Countess raised her eyebrows.

"In India, then, one hears of everything! Did that news please you?"

"Well, since you ask me—no."

"I understand that," said the Countess, looking at her open fan. "I shall not marry again like that."

"That's what your mother said to me," I ventured to observe.

She was not offended, but she rose from her seat and stood looking at me a moment. Then:

"You should not have gone away!" she exclaimed.

I stayed for another hour; it is a very pleasant house. Two or three of the men who were sitting there seemed very civil and intelligent; one of them was a major of engineers, who offered me a profusion of information upon the new organisation of the Italian army. While he talked, however, I was observing our hostess, who was talking with the others; very little, I noticed, with her young *Inglese*. She is altogether charming—full of frankness and freedom, of that inimitable *disinvoltura* which in an Englishwoman would be vulgar, and which in her is



simply the perfection of apparent spontaneity. But for all her spontaneity she's as subtle as a needle-point, and knows tremendously well what she is about. If she is not a consummate coquette. . . . What had she in her head when she said that I should not have gone away?—Poor little Stanmer didn't go away. I left him there at midnight.

12th.—I found him to-day sitting in the church of Santa Croce, into which I wandered to escape from the heat of the sun.

In the nave it was cool and dim ; he was staring at the blaze of candles on the great altar, and thinking, I am sure, of his incomparable Countess. I sat down beside him, and after a while, as if to avoid the appearance of eagerness, he asked me how I had enjoyed my visit to Casa Salvi, and what I thought of the *padrona*.

"I think half-a-dozen things," I said ; "but I can only tell you one now. She's an enchantress. You shall hear the rest when we have left the church."

"An enchantress?" repeated Stanmer, looking at me askance.

He is a very simple youth, but who am I to blame him?

"A charmer," I said ; "a fascinatress!"

He turned away, staring at the altar-candles.

"An artist — an actress," I went on, rather brutally.

He gave me another glance.

"I think you are telling me all," he said.

"No, no, there is more." And we sat a long time in silence.

At last he proposed that we should go out ; and we passed in the street, where the shadows had begun to stretch themselves.

"I don't know what you mean by her being an actress," he said, as we turned homeward.

## THE DIARY OF A MAN OF FIFTY

"I suppose not. Neither should I have known, if any one had said that to me."

"You are thinking about the mother," said Stanmer. "Why are you always bringing *her* in?"

"My dear boy, the analogy is so great; it forces itself upon me."

He stopped, and stood looking at me with his modest, perplexed young face. I thought he was going to exclaim, "The analogy be hanged!" but he said after a moment:

"Well, what does it prove?"

"I can't say it proves anything; but it suggests a great many things."

"Be so good as to mention a few," he said, as we walked on.

"You are not sure of her yourself," I began.

"Never mind that—go on with your analogy."

"That's a part of it. You *are* very much in love with her."

"That's a part of it too, I suppose?"

"Yes, as I have told you before. You are in love with her, and yet you can't make her out; that's just where I was with regard to Madame de Salvi."

"And she too was an enchantress, an actress, an artist, and all the rest of it?"

"She was the most perfect coquette I ever knew, and the most dangerous, because the most finished."

"What you mean, then, is that her daughter is a finished coquette?"

"I rather think so."

Stanmer walked along for some moments in silence.

"Seeing that you suppose me to be a—a great admirer of the Countess," he said at last, "I am rather surprised at the freedom with which you speak of her."

I confessed that I was surprised at it myself.



## THE DIARY OF A MAN OF FIFTY

"But it's on account of the interest I take in you."

"I am immensely obliged to you!" said the poor boy.

"Ah, of course you don't like it. That is, you like my interest—I don't see how you can help liking that; but you don't like my freedom. That's natural enough; but, my dear young friend, I want only to help you. If a man had said to me—so many years ago—what I am saying to you, I should certainly also, at first, have thought him a great brute. But, after a little, I should have been grateful—I should have felt that he was helping me."

"You seem to have been very well able to help yourself," said Stanmer. "You tell me you made your escape."

"Yes, but it was at the cost of infinite perplexity—of what I may call keen suffering. I should like to save you all that."

"I can only repeat—it is really very kind of you."

"Don't repeat it too often, or I shall begin to think you don't mean it."

"Well," said Stanmer, "I think this, at any rate—that you take an extraordinary responsibility in trying to put a man out of conceit of a woman who, as he believes, may make him very happy."

I grasped his arm, and we stopped, going on with our talk like a couple of Florentines.

"Do you wish to marry her?"

He looked away, without meeting my eyes. "It's a great responsibility," he repeated.

"Before Heaven," I said, "I would have married the mother! You are exactly in my situation."

"Don't you think you rather overdo the analogy?" asked poor Stanmer.

"A little more, a little less—it doesn't matter. I believe you are in my shoes. But of course if you

## THE DIARY OF A MAN OF FIFTY

prefer it I will beg a thousand pardons and leave them to carry you where they will."

He had been looking away, but now he slowly turned his face and met my eyes. "You have gone too far to retreat; what is it you know about her?"

"About this one—nothing. But about the other —"

"I care nothing about the other!"

"My dear fellow," I said, "they are mother and daughter—they are as like as two of Andrea's Madonnas."

"If they resemble each other, then, you were simply mistaken in the mother."

I took his arm and we walked on again; there seemed no adequate reply to such a charge. "Your state of mind brings back my own so completely," I said presently. "You admire her—you adore her, and yet, secretly, you mistrust her. You are enchanted with her personal charm, her grace, her wit, her everything; and yet in your private heart you are afraid of her."

"Afraid of her?"

"Your mistrust keeps rising to the surface; you can't rid yourself of the suspicion that at the bottom of all things she is hard and cruel, and you would be immensely relieved if some one should persuade you that your suspicion is right."

Stanmer made no direct reply to this; but before we reached the hotel he said, "What did you ever know about the mother?"

"It's a terrible story," I answered.

He looked at me askance. "What did she do?"

"Come to my rooms this evening and I will tell you."

He declared he would, but he never came. Exactly the way I should have acted!

14th.—I went again, last evening, to Casa Salvi,

## THE DIARY OF A MAN OF FIFTY

where I found the same little circle, with the addition of a couple of ladies. Stanmer was there, trying hard to talk to one of them, but making, I am sure, a very poor business of it. The Countess—well, the Countess was admirable. She greeted me like a friend of ten years, toward whom familiarity should not have engendered a want of ceremony; she made me sit near her, and she asked me a dozen questions about my health and my occupations.

"I live in the past," I said. "I go into the galleries, into the old palaces and the churches. To-day I spent an hour in Michael Angelo's chapel, at San Lorenzo."

"Ah, yes, that's the past," said the Countess. "Those things are very old."

"Twenty-seven years old," I answered.

"Twenty-seven? *Altro!*"

"I mean my own past," I said. "I went to a great many of those places with your mother."

"Ah, the pictures are beautiful," murmured the Countess, glancing at Stanmer.

"Have you lately looked at any of them?" I asked. "Have you gone to the galleries with *him*?"

She hesitated a moment, smiling. "It seems to me that your question is a little impertinent. But I think you are like that."

"A little impertinent? Never. As I say, your mother did me the honour more than once, to accompany me to the Uffizzi."

"My mother must have been very kind to you."

"So it seemed to me at the time."

"At the time, only?"

"Well, if you prefer, so it seems to me now."

"Eh," said the Countess, "she made sacrifices."

"To what, cara Signora? She was perfectly free. Your lamented father was dead—and she had not yet contracted her second marriage."

## THE DIARY OF A MAN OF FIFTY

"If she was intending to marry again, it was all the more reason she should have been careful."

I looked at her a moment; she met my eyes gravely, over the top of her fan. "Are *you* very careful?" I said.

She dropped her fan with a certain violence. "Ah, yes, you are impertinent!"

"Ah, no," I said. "Remember that I am old enough to be your father; that I knew you when you were three years old. I may surely ask such questions. But you are right; one must do your mother justice. She was certainly thinking of her second marriage."

"You have not forgiven her that!" said the Countess, very gravely.

"Have you?" I asked, more lightly.

"I don't judge my mother. That is a mortal sin. My step-father was very kind to me."

"I remember him," I said; "I saw him a great many times—your mother already received him."

My hostess sat with lowered eyes, saying nothing; but she presently looked up.

"She was very unhappy with my father."

"That I can easily believe. And your step-father—is he still living?"

"He died—before my mother."

"Did he fight any more duels?"

"He was killed in a duel," said the Countess, discreetly.

It seems almost monstrous, especially as I can give no reason for it—but this announcement, instead of shocking me, caused me to feel a strange exhilaration. Most assuredly, after all these years, I bear the poor man no resentment. Of course I controlled my manner, and simply remarked to the Countess that as his fault had been, so was his punishment. I think, however, that the feeling of which I speak

## THE DIARY OF A MAN OF FIFTY

was at the bottom of my saying to her that I hoped that, unlike her mother's, her own brief married life had been happy.

"If it was not," she said, "I have forgotten it now."—I wonder if the late Count Scarabelli was also killed in a duel, and if his adversary . . . Is it on the books that his adversary, as well, shall perish by the pistol? Which of those gentlemen is he, I wonder? Is it reserved for poor little Stanmer to put a bullet into him? No; poor little Stanmer, I trust, will do as I did. And yet, unfortunately for him, that woman is consummately plausible. She was wonderfully nice last evening; she was really irresistible. Such frankness and freedom, and yet something so soft and womanly; such graceful gaiety, so much of the brightness, without any of the stiffness, of good breeding, and over it all something so picturesquely simple and southern. She is a perfect Italian. But she comes honestly by it. After the talk I have just jotted down she changed her place, and the conversation for half an hour was general. Stanmer indeed said very little; partly, I suppose, because he is shy of talking a foreign tongue. Was I like that—was I so constantly silent? I suspect I was when I was perplexed, and Heaven knows that very often my perplexity was extreme. Before I went away I had a few more words *tête-à-tête* with the Countess.

"I hope you are not leaving Florence yet," she said; "you will stay a while longer?"

I answered that I came only for a week, and that my week was over.

"I stay on from day to day, I am so much interested."

"Eh, it's the beautiful moment. I'm glad our city pleases you!"

"Florence pleases me—and I take a paternal

## THE DIARY OF A MAN OF FIFTY

interest in our young friend," I added, glancing at Stanmer. "I have become very fond of him."

"*Bel tipo inglese*," said my hostess. "And he is very intelligent; he has a beautiful mind."

She stood there resting her smile and her clear, expressive eyes upon me.

"I don't like to praise him too much," I rejoined, "lest I should appear to praise myself; he reminds me so much of what I was at his age. If your beautiful mother were to come to life for an hour she would see the resemblance."

She gave me a little amused stare.

"And yet you don't look at all like him!"

"Ah, you didn't know me when I was twenty-five. I was very handsome! And, moreover, it isn't that, it's the mental resemblance. I was ingenuous, candid, trusting, like him."

"Trusting? I remember my mother once telling me that you were the most suspicious and jealous of men!"

"I fell into a suspicious mood, but I was, fundamentally, not in the least addicted to thinking evil. I couldn't easily imagine any harm of any one."

"And so you mean that Mr. Stanmer is in a suspicious mood?"

"Well, I mean that his situation is the same as mine."

The Countess gave me one of her serious looks.

"Come," she said, "what was it—this famous situation of yours? I have heard you mention it before."

"Your mother might have told you, since she occasionally did me the honour to speak of me."

"All my mother ever told me was that you were a sad puzzle to her."

At this, of course, I laughed out—I laugh still as I write it.



## THE DIARY OF A MAN OF FIFTY

"Well, then, that was my situation—I was a sad puzzle to a very clever woman."

"And you mean, therefore, that I am a puzzle to poor Mr. Stanmer?"

"He is racking his brains to make you out. Remember it was you who said he was intelligent."

She looked round at him, and as fortune would have it, his appearance at that moment quite confirmed my assertion. He was lounging back in his chair with an air of indolence rather too marked for a drawing-room, and staring at the ceiling with the expression of a man who has just been asked a conundrum. Madame Scarabelli seemed struck with his attitude.

"Don't you see," I said, "he can't read the riddle?"

"You yourself," she answered, "said he was incapable of thinking evil. I should be sorry to have him think any evil of *me*."

And she looked straight at me—seriously, appealingly—with her beautiful candid brow.

I inclined myself, smiling, in a manner which might have meant:

"How could that be possible?"

"I have a great esteem for him," she went on; "I want him to think well of me. If I am a puzzle to him, do me a little service. Explain me to him."

"Explain you, dear lady?"

"You are older and wiser than he. Make him understand me."

She looked deep into my eyes for a moment, and then she turned away.

26th.—I have written nothing for a good many days, but meanwhile I have been half-a-dozen times to Casa Salvi. I have seen a good deal also of my young friend—had a good many walks and talks with him. I have proposed to him to come with me

## THE DIARY OF A MAN OF FIFTY

to Venice for a fortnight, but he won't listen to the idea of leaving Florence. He is very happy in spite of his doubts, and I confess that in the perception of his happiness I have lived over again my own. This is so much the case that when, the other day, he at last made up his mind to ask me to tell him the wrong that Madame de Salvi had done me, I rather checked his curiosity. I told him that if he was bent upon knowing I would satisfy him, but that it seemed a pity, just now, to indulge in painful imagery.

"But I thought you wanted so much to put me out of conceit of our friend."

"I admit I am inconsistent, but there are various reasons for it. In the first place—it's obvious—I am open to the charge of playing a double game. I profess an admiration for the Countess Scarabelli, for I accept her hospitality, and at the same time I attempt to poison your mind; isn't that the proper expression? I can't exactly make up my mind to that, though my admiration for the Countess and my desire to prevent you from taking a foolish step are equally sincere. And then, in the second place you seem to me on the whole so happy! One hesitates to destroy an illusion, no matter how pernicious, that is so delightful while it lasts. These are the rare moments of life. To be young and ardent, in the midst of an Italian spring, and to believe in the moral perfection of a beautiful woman—what an admirable situation! Float with the current; I'll stand on the brink and watch you."

"Your real reason is that you feel you have no case against the poor lady," said Stanmer. "You admire her as much as I do."

"I just admitted that I admired her. I never said she was a vulgar flirt; her mother was an absolutely scientific one. Heaven knows I admired that! It's a nice point, however, how much one is bound in



honour not to warn a young friend against a dangerous woman because one also has relations of civility with the lady."

"In such a case," said Stanmer, "I would break off my relations."

I looked at him, and I think I laughed.

"Are you jealous of me, by chance?"

He shook his head emphatically.

"Not in the least; I like to see you there, because your conduct contradicts your words."

"I have always said that the Countess is fascinating."

"Otherwise," said Stanmer, "in the case you speak of I would give the lady notice."

"Give her notice?"

"Mention to her that you regard her with suspicion, and that you propose to do your best to rescue a simple-minded youth from her wiles. That would be more loyal." And he began to laugh again.

It is not the first time he has laughed at me; but I have never minded it, because I have always understood it.

"Is that what you recommend me to say to the Countess?" I asked.

"Recommend you!" he exclaimed, laughing again; "I recommend nothing. I may be the victim to be rescued, but I am at least not a partner to the conspiracy. Besides," he added in a moment, "the Countess knows your state of mind."

"Has she told you so?"

Stanmer hesitated.

"She has begged me to listen to everything you may say against her. She declares that she has a good conscience."

"Ah," said I, "she's an accomplished woman!"

And it is indeed very clever of her to take that tone. Stanmer afterwards assured me explicitly that

he has never given her a hint of the liberties I have taken in conversation with—what shall I call it?—with her moral nature; she has guessed them for herself. She must hate me intensely, and yet her manner has always been so charming to me! She is truly an accomplished woman!

*May 4th.*—I have stayed away from Casa Salvi for a week, but I have lingered on in Florence, under a mixture of impulses. I have had it on my conscience not to go near the Countess again—and yet from the moment she is aware of the way I feel about her, it is open war. There need be no scruples on either side. She is as free to use every possible art to entangle poor Stanmer more closely as I am to clip her fine-spun meshes. Under the circumstances, however, we naturally shouldn't meet very cordially. But as regards her meshes, why, after all, should I clip them? It would really be very interesting to see Stanmer swallowed up. I should like to see how he would agree with her after she had devoured him—(to what vulgar imagery, by the way, does curiosity reduce a man!) Let him finish the story in his own way, as I finished it in mine. It is the same story; but why, a quarter of a century later, should it have the same *dénoûment*? Let him make his own *dénoûment*.

*5th.*—Hang it, however, I don't want the poor boy to be miserable.

*6th.*—Ah, but did my *dénoûment* then prove such a happy one?

*7th.*—He came to my room late last night; he was much excited.

"What was it she did to you?" he asked.

I answered him first with another question. "Have you quarrelled with the Countess?"

But he only repeated his own. "What was it she did to you?"

"Sit down and I'll tell you." And he sat there beside the candle, staring at me. "There was a man always there—Count Camerino."

"The man she married?"

"The man she married. I was very much in love with her, and yet I didn't trust her. I was sure that she lied; I believed that she could be cruel. Nevertheless, at moments, she had a charm which made it pure pedantry to be conscious of her faults; and while these moments lasted I would have done anything for her. Unfortunately, they didn't last long. But you know what I mean; am I not describing the Scarabelli?"

"The Countess Scarabelli never lied!" cried Stanmer.

"That's just what I would have said to any one who should have made the insinuation! But I suppose you are not asking me the question you put to me just now from dispassionate curiosity."

"A man may want to know!" said the innocent fellow.

I couldn't help laughing out. "This, at any rate, is my story. Camerino was always there; he was a sort of fixture in the house. If I had moments of dislike for the divine Bianca, I had no moments of liking for him. And yet he was a very agreeable fellow, very civil, very intelligent, not in the least disposed to make a quarrel with me. The trouble of course was simply that I was jealous of him. I don't know, however, on what ground I could have quarrelled with him, for I had no definite rights. I can't say what I expected—I can't say what, as the matter stood, I was prepared to do. With my name and my prospects, I might perfectly have offered her my hand. I am not sure that she would have accepted it—I am by no means clear that she wanted that. But she wanted, wanted keenly, to attach me

## THE DIARY OF A MAN OF FIFTY

to her ; she wanted to have me about. I should have been capable of giving up everything—England, my career, my family—simply to devote myself to her, to live near her and see her every day.”

“ Why didn’t you do it, then ? ” asked Stanmer.

“ Why don’t you ? ”

“ To be a proper rejoinder to my question,” he said, rather neatly, “ yours should be asked twenty-five years hence.”

“ It remains perfectly true that at a given moment I was capable of doing as I say. That was what she wanted—a rich, susceptible, credulous, convenient young Englishman established near her *en permanence*. And yet,” I added, “ I must do her complete justice. I honestly believe she was fond of me.” At this Stanmer got up and walked to the window ; he stood looking out a moment, and then he turned round. “ You know she was older than I,” I went on. “ Madame Scarabelli is older than you. One day in the garden, her mother asked me in an angry tone why I disliked Camerino ; for I had been at no pains to conceal my feeling about him, and something had just happened to bring it out. ‘ I dislike him,’ I said, ‘ because you like him so much.’ ‘ I assure you I don’t like him,’ she answered. ‘ He has all the appearance of being your lover,’ I retorted. It was a brutal speech, certainly, but any other man in my place would have made it. She took it very strangely ; she turned pale, but she was not indignant. ‘ How can he be my lover after what he has done ? ’ she asked. ‘ What has he done ? ’ She hesitated a good while, then she said : ‘ He killed my husband.’ ‘ Good heavens ! ’ I cried, ‘ and you receive him ? ’ Do you know what she said ? She said, ‘ *Che vuole ?* ’ ”

“ Is that all ? ” asked Stanmer.

“ No ; she went on to say that Camerino had

killed Count Salvi in a duel, and she admitted that her husband's jealousy had been the occasion of it. The Count, it appeared, was a monster of jealousy—he had led her a dreadful life. He himself, meanwhile, had been anything but irreproachable; he had done a mortal injury to a man of whom he pretended to be a friend, and this affair had become notorious. The gentleman in question had demanded satisfaction for his outraged honour; but for some reason or other (the Countess, to do her justice, did not tell me that her husband was a coward), he had not as yet obtained it. The duel with Camerino had come on first; in an access of jealous fury the Count had struck Camerino in the face; and this outrage, I know not how justly, was deemed expiable before the other. By an extraordinary arrangement (the Italians have certainly no sense of fair play), the other man was allowed to be Camerino's second. The duel was fought with swords, and the Count received a wound of which, though at first it was not expected to be fatal, he died on the following day. The matter was hushed up as much as possible for the sake of the Countess's good name, and so successfully that it was presently observed that, among the public, the other gentleman had the credit of having put his blade through M. de Salvi. This gentleman took a fancy not to contradict the impression, and it was allowed to subsist. So long as *he* consented, it was of course in Camerino's interest not to contradict it, as it left him much more free to keep up his intimacy with the Countess."

Stanmer had listened to all this with extreme attention. "Why didn't *she* contradict it?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "I am bound to believe it was for the same reason. I was horrified, at any rate, by the whole story. I was extremely shocked at the Countess's want of dignity in continuing to

## THE DIARY OF A MAN OF FIFTY

see the man by whose hand her husband had fallen."

"The husband had been a great brute, and it was not known," said Stanmer.

"Its not being known made no difference. And as for Salvi having been a brute, that is but a way of saying that his wife, and the man whom his wife subsequently married, didn't like him."

Stanmer looked extremely meditative; his eyes were fixed on mine. "Yes, that marriage is hard to get over. It was not becoming."

"Ah," said I, "what a long breath I drew when I heard of it! I remember the place and the hour. It was at a hill-station in India, seven years after I had left Florence. The post brought me some English papers, and in one of them was a letter from Italy, with a lot of so-called 'fashionable intelligence.' There, among various scandals in high life, and other delectable items, I read that the Countess Bianca Salvi, famous for some years as the presiding genius of the most agreeable *salon* in Florence, was about to bestow her hand upon Count Camerino, a distinguished Bolognese. Ah, my dear boy, it was a tremendous escape! I had been ready to marry the woman who was capable of that! But my instinct had warned me, and I had trusted my instinct."

"'Instinct's everything,' as Falstaff says!" And Stanmer began to laugh. "Did you tell Madame de Salvi that your instinct was against her?"

"No; I told her that she frightened me, shocked me, horrified me."

"That's about the same thing. And what did she say?"

"She asked me what I would have? I called her friendship with Camerino a scandal, and she answered that her husband had been a brute. Besides, no one knew it; therefore it was no scandal. Just *your*



argument ! I retorted that this was odious reasoning, and that she had no moral sense. We had a passionate argument, and I declared I would never see her again. In the heat of my displeasure I left Florence, and I kept my vow. I never saw her again."

" You couldn't have been much in love with her," said Stanmer.

" I was not—three months after."

" If you had been you would have come back—three days after."

" So doubtless it seems to you. All I can say is that it was the great effort of my life. Being a military man, I have had on various occasions to face the enemy. But it was not then I needed my resolution ; it was when I left Florence in a post-chaise."

Stanmer turned about the room two or three times, and then he said : " I don't understand ! I don't understand why she should have told you that Camerino had killed her husband. It could only damage her."

" She was afraid it would damage her more that I should think he was her lover. She wished to say the thing that would most effectually persuade me that he was not her lover—that he could never be. And then she wished to get the credit of being very frank."

" Good heavens, how you must have analysed her ! " cried my companion, staring.

" There is nothing so analytic as disillusionment. But there it is. She married Camerino."

" Yes, I don't like that," said Stanmer. He was silent a while, and then he added—" Perhaps she wouldn't have done so if you had remained."

He has a little innocent way ! " Very likely she would have dispensed with the ceremony," I answered dryly.

## THE DIARY OF A MAN OF FIFTY

"Upon my word," he said, "you *have* analysed her!"

"You ought to be grateful to me. I have done for you what you seem unable to do for yourself."

"I don't see any Camerino in my case," he said.

"Perhaps among those gentlemen I can find one for you."

"Thank you," he cried; "I'll take care of that myself!" And he went away—satisfied, I hope.

10th.—He's an obstinate little wretch; it irritates me to see him sticking to it. Perhaps he is looking for his Camerino. I shall leave him at any rate to his fate; it is growing insupportably hot.

11th.—I went this evening to bid farewell to the Scarabelli. There was no one there; she was alone in her great dusky drawing-room, which was lighted only by a couple of candles, with the immense windows open over the garden. She was dressed in white; she was deucedly pretty. She asked me of course why I had been so long without coming.

"I think you say that only for form," I answered. "I imagine you know."

"*Che!* what have I done?"

"Nothing at all. You are too wise for that."

She looked at me a while. "I think you are a little crazy."

"Ah no, I am only too sane. I have too much reason rather than too little."

"You have at any rate what we call a fixed idea."

"There is no harm in that so long as it's a good one."

"But yours is abominable!" she exclaimed with a laugh.

"Of course you can't like me or my ideas. All things considered, you have treated me with wonderful kindness, and I thank you and kiss your hands. I leave Florence to-morrow."



## THE DIARY OF A MAN OF FIFTY

" I won't say I'm sorry ! " she said, laughing again. " But I am very glad to have seen you. I always wondered about you. You are a curiosity."

" Yes, you must find me so. A man who can resist your charms ! The fact is, I can't. This evening you are enchanting ; and it is the first time I have been alone with you."

She gave no heed to this ; she turned away. But in a moment she came back, and stood looking at me, and her beautiful solemn eyes seemed to shine in the dimness of the room.

" How *could* you treat my mother so ? " she asked.

" Treat her so ? "

" How could you desert the most charming woman in the world ? "

" It was not a case of desertion ; and if it had been it seems to me she was consoled."

At this moment there was the sound of a step in the ante-chamber, and I saw that the Countess perceived it to be Stanmer's.

" That wouldn't have happened," she murmured. " My poor mother needed a protector."

Stanmer came in, interrupting our talk, and looking at me, I thought, with a little air of bravado. He must think me indeed a tiresome, meddlesome bore ; and upon my word, turning it all over, I wonder at his docility. After all, he's five-and-twenty—and yet, I *must* add, it *does* irritate me—the way he sticks ! He was followed in a moment by two or three of the regular Italians, and I made my visit short.

" Good-bye, Countess," I said ; and she gave me her hand in silence. " Do *you* need a protector ? " I added, softly.

She looked at me from head to foot, and then, almost angrily :

" Yes, Signore."

But, to deprecate her anger, I kept her hand an

## THE DIARY OF A MAN OF FIFTY

instant, and then bent my venerable head and kissed it. I think I appeased her.

BOLOGNA, 14<sup>th</sup>.—I left Florence on the 11<sup>th</sup>, and have been here these three days. Delightful old Italian town—but it lacks the charm of my Florentine secret.

I wrote that last entry five days ago, late at night, after coming back from Casa Salvi. I afterwards fell asleep in my chair; the night was half over when I woke up. Instead of going to bed, I stood a long time at the window, looking out at the river. It was a warm, still night, and the first faint streaks of sunrise were in the sky. Presently I heard a slow footstep beneath my window, and looking down, made out by the aid of a street-lamp that Stanmer was but just coming home. I called to him to come to my rooms, and, after an interval, he made his appearance.

"I want to bid you good-bye," I said; "I shall depart in the morning. Don't go to the trouble of saying you are sorry. Of course you are not; I must have bullied you immensely."

He made no attempt to say he was sorry, but he said he was very glad to have made my acquaintance.

"Your conversation," he said, with his little innocent air, "has been very suggestive."

"Have you found Camerino?" I asked, smiling.

"I have given up the search."

"Well," I said, "some day when you find that you have made a great mistake, remember I told you so."

He looked for a minute as if he were trying to anticipate that day by the exercise of his reason.

"Has it ever occurred to you that *you* may have made a great mistake?"

"Oh yes; everything occurs to one sooner or later."

That's what I said to him; but I didn't say that

## THE DIARY OF A MAN OF FIFTY

the question, pointed by his candid young countenance, had, for the moment, a greater force than it had ever had before.

And then he asked me whether, as things had turned out, I myself had been so especially happy.

PARIS, *December 17th.*—A note from young Stanmer, whom I saw in Florence—a remarkable little note, dated Rome, and worth transcribing.

*"My Dear General,—I have it at heart to tell you that I was married a week ago to the Countess Salvi-Scarabelli. You talked me into a great muddle; but a month after that it was all very clear. Things that involve a risk are like the Christian faith; they must be seen from the inside.—Yours ever, E. S."*

*"P.S.—A fig for analogies unless you can find an analogy for my happiness!"*

His happiness makes him very clever. I hope it will last!—I mean his cleverness, not his happiness.

LONDON, *April 19th, 1877.*—Last night, at Lady H——'s, I met Edmund Stanmer, who married Bianca Salvi's daughter. I heard the other day that they had come to England. A handsome young fellow, with a fresh contented face. He reminded me of Florence, which I didn't pretend to forget; but it was rather awkward, for I remember I used to disparage that woman to him. I had a complete theory about her. But he didn't seem at all stiff; on the contrary, he appeared to enjoy our encounter. I asked him if his wife were there. I had to do that.

"Oh yes, she's in one of the other rooms. Come and make her acquaintance; I want you to know her."

"You forget that I do know her."

"Oh no, you don't; you never did." And he gave a little significant laugh.

I didn't feel like facing the *ci-devant* Scarabelli at that moment; so I said that I was leaving the house, but that I would do myself the honour of calling upon

his wife. We talked for a minute of something else, and then, suddenly, breaking off and looking at me, he laid his hand on my arm. I must do him the justice to say that he looks felicitous.

"Depend upon it, you were wrong!" he said.

"My dear young friend," I answered, "imagine the alacrity with which I concede it."

Something else again was spoken of, but in an instant he repeated his movement.

"Depend upon it, you were wrong."

"I am sure the Countess has forgiven me," I said, "and in that case you ought to bear no grudge. As I have had the honour to say, I will call upon her immediately."

"I was not alluding to my wife," he answered. "I was thinking of your own story."

"My own story?"

"So many years ago. Was it not rather a mistake?"

I looked at him a moment; he's positively rosy.

"That's not a question to solve in a London crush."

And I turned away.

22nd.—I haven't yet called on the *ci-devant*; I am afraid of finding her at home. And that boy's words have been thrumming in my ears—"Depend upon it, you were wrong. Wasn't it rather a mistake?" *Was I wrong—was it a mistake? Was I too cautious—too suspicious—too logical? Was it really a protector she needed—a man who might have helped her? Would it have been for his benefit to believe in her, and was her fault only that I had forsaken her? Was the poor woman very unhappy? God forgive me, how the questions come crowding in! If I marred her happiness, I certainly didn't make my own. And I might have made it—eh? That's a charming discovery for a man of my age!*

A NEW ENGLAND WINTER



## I

MRS. DAINTRY stood on her steps a moment, to address a parting injunction to her little domestic, whom she had induced a few days before, by earnest and friendly argument—the only coercion or persuasion this enlightened mistress was ever known to use—to crown her ruffled tresses with a cap; and then, slowly and with deliberation, she descended to the street. As soon as her back was turned, her maid-servant closed the door, not with violence, but inaudibly, quickly, and firmly; so that when she reached the bottom of the steps and looked up again at the front—as she always did before leaving it, to assure herself that everything was well—the folded wings of her portal were presented to her, smooth and shining, as wings should be, and ornamented with the large silver plate on which the name of her late husband was inscribed—which she had brought with her when, taking the inevitable course of good Bostonians, she had transferred her household goods from the “hill” to the “new land,” and the exhibition of which, as an act of conjugal fidelity, she preferred—how much, those who knew her could easily understand—to the more distinguished modern fashion of suppressing the domiciliary label. She stood still for a minute on the pavement, looking at the closed aperture of her dwelling and asking herself a question; not that there was anything extraordinary in that, for she

never spared herself in this respect. She would greatly have preferred that her servant should not shut the door till she had reached the sidewalk and dismissed her, as it were, with that benevolent, that almost maternal, smile with which it was a part of Mrs. Daintry's religion to encourage and reward her domestics. She liked to know that her door was being held open behind her until she should pass out of sight of the young woman standing in the hall. There was a want of respect in shutting her out so precipitately ; it was almost like giving her a push down the steps. What Mrs. Daintry asked herself was, whether she should not do right to ascend the steps again, ring the bell, and request Beatrice, the parlour-maid, to be so good as to wait a little longer. She felt that this would have been a proceeding of some importance, and she presently decided against it. There were a good many reasons, and she thought them over as she took her way slowly up Newbury Street, turning as soon as possible into Commonwealth Avenue ; for she was very fond of the south side of this beautiful prospect, and the autumn sunshine to-day was delightful. During the moment that she paused, looking up at her house, she had had time to see that everything was as fresh and bright as she could desire. It looked a little too new, perhaps, and Florimond would not like that ; for of course his great fondness was for the antique, which was the reason for his remaining year after year in Europe, where, as a young painter of considerable, if not of the highest, promise, he had opportunities to study the most dilapidated buildings. It was a comfort to Mrs. Daintry, however, to be able to say to herself that he would be struck with her living really very nicely—more nicely, in many ways, than he could possibly be accommodated—that she was sure of—in a small dark *appartement de garçon* in



Paris, on the uncomfortable side of the Seine. Her state of mind at present was such that she set the highest value on anything that could possibly help to give Florimond a pleasant impression. Nothing could be too small to count, she said to herself ; for she knew that Florimond was both fastidious and observant. Everything that would strike him agreeably would contribute to detain him, so that if there were only enough agreeable things he would perhaps stay four or five months, instead of three, as he had promised—the three that were to date from the day of his arrival in Boston, not from that (an important difference) of his departure from Liverpool, which was about to take place.

It was Florimond that Mrs. Daintry had had in mind when, on emerging from the little vestibule, she gave the direction to Beatrice about the position of the door-mat—in which the young woman, so carefully selected, as a Protestant, from the British Provinces, had never yet taken the interest that her mistress expected from such antecedents. It was Florimond also that she had thought of in putting before her parlour-maid the question of donning a badge of servitude in the shape of a neat little muslin coif, adorned with pink ribbon and stitched together by Mrs. Daintry's own beneficent fingers. Naturally there was no obvious connexion between the parlour-maid's coiffure and the length of Florimond's stay ; that detail was to be only a part of the general effect of American life. It was still Florimond that was uppermost as his mother, on her way up the hill, turned over in her mind that question of the ceremony of the front-door. He had been living in a country in which servants observed more forms, and he would doubtless be shocked at Beatrice's want of patience. An accumulation of such anomalies would at last undermine his loyalty. He would not care for them

for himself, of course, but he would care about them for her ; coming from France, where, as she knew by his letters, and indeed by her own reading—for she made a remarkably free use of the Athenæum—that the position of a mother was one of the most exalted, he could not fail to be *froissé* at any want of consideration for his surviving parent. As an artist, he could not make up his mind to live in Boston ; but he was a good son for all that. He had told her frequently that they might easily live together if she would only come to Paris ; but of course she could not do that, with Joanna and her six children round in Clarendon Street, and her responsibilities to her daughter multiplied in the highest degree. Besides, during that winter she spent in Paris, when Florimond was definitely making up his mind, and they had in the evening the most charming conversations, interrupted only by the repeated care of winding-up the lamp, or applying the bellows to the obstinate little fire—during that winter she had felt that Paris was not her element. She had gone to the lectures at the Sorbonne, and she had visited the Louvre as few people did it, catalogue in hand, taking the catalogue volume by volume ; but all the while she was thinking of Joanna and her new baby, and how the other three (that was the number then) were getting on while their mother was so much absorbed with the last. Mrs. Daintry, familiar as she was with these anxieties, had not the step of a grandmother ; for a mind that was always intent had the effect of refreshing and brightening her years. Responsibility with her was not a weariness, but a joy—at least it was the nearest approach to a joy that she knew, and she did not regard her life as especially cheerless ; there were many others that were more denuded. She moved with circumspection, but without reluctance, holding up her head and looking at every one she met with a

clear, unaccusing gaze. This expression showed that she took an interest, as she ought, in everything that concerned her fellow-creatures ; but there was that also in her whole person which indicated that she went no farther than Christian charity required. It was only with regard to Joanna and that vociferous houseful—so fertile in problems, in opportunities for devotion—that she went really very far. And now to-day, of course, in this matter of Florimond's visit, after an absence of six years ; which was perhaps more on her mind than anything had ever been. People who met Mrs. Daintry after she had traversed the Public Garden—she always took that way—and begun to ascend the charming slope of Beacon Street, would never, in spite of the relaxation of her pace as she measured this eminence, have mistaken her for a little old lady who should have crept out, vaguely and timidly, to inhale one of the last mild days. It was easy to see that she was not without a duty, or at least a reason—and indeed Mrs. Daintry had never in her life been left in this predicament. People who knew her ever so little would have felt that she was going to call on a relation ; and if they had been to the manner born they would have added a mental hope that her relation was prepared for her visit. No one would have doubted this, however, who had been aware that her steps were directed to the habitation of Miss Lucretia Daintry. Her sister-in-law, her husband's only sister, lived in that commodious nook which is known as Mount Vernon Place ; and Mrs. Daintry therefore turned off at Joy Street. By the time she did so, she had quite settled in her mind the question of Beatrice's behaviour in connexion with the front-door. She had decided that it would never do to make a formal remonstrance, for it was plain that, in spite of the Old-World training which she hoped the girl might have imbibed in Nova Scotia

## A NEW ENGLAND WINTER

(where, until lately, she learned, there had been an English garrison), she would in such a case expose herself to the danger of desertion ; Beatrice would not consent to stand there holding the door open for nothing. And after all, in the depths of her conscience Mrs. Daintry was not sure that she ought to ; she was not sure that this was an act of homage that one human being had a right to exact of another, simply because this other happened to wear a little muslin cap with pink ribbons. It was a service that ministered to her importance, to her dignity, not to her hunger or thirst ; and Mrs. Daintry, who had had other foreign advantages besides her winter in Paris, was quite aware that in the United States the machinery for that former kind of tribute was very undeveloped. It was a luxury that one ought not to pretend to enjoy—it was a luxury, indeed, that she probably ought not to presume to desire. At the bottom of her heart Mrs. Daintry suspected that such hankerings were criminal. And yet, turning the thing over, as she turned everything, she could not help coming back to the idea that it would be very pleasant, it would be really delightful, if Beatrice herself, as a result of the growing refinement of her taste, her transplantation to a society after all more elaborate than that of Nova Scotia, should perceive the fitness, the felicity, of such an attitude. This perhaps was too much to hope ; but it did not much matter, for before she had turned into Mount Vernon Place Mrs. Daintry had invented a compromise. She would continue to talk to her parlour-maid until she should reach the bottom of her steps, making earnestly one remark after the other over her shoulder, so that Beatrice would be obliged to remain on the threshold. It is true that it occurred to her that the girl might not attach much importance to these Parthian observations, and would perhaps not trouble herself to wait

## A NEW ENGLAND WINTER

for their natural term ; but this idea was too fraught with embarrassment to be long entertained. It must be added that this was scarcely a moment for Mrs. Daintry to go much into the ethics of the matter, for she felt that her call upon her sister-in-law was the consequence of a tolerably unscrupulous determination.

## II

LUCRETIA DAINTRY was at home, for a wonder ; but she kept her visitor waiting a quarter of an hour, during which this lady had plenty of time to consider her errand afresh. She was a little ashamed of it ; but she did not so much mind being put to shame by Lucretia, for Lucretia did things that were much more ambiguous than any she should have thought of doing. It was even for this that Mrs. Daintry had picked her out, among so many relations, as the object of an appeal in its nature somewhat ambiguous. Nevertheless, her heart beat a little faster than usual as she sat in the quiet parlour, looking about her for the thousandth time at Lucretia's " things," and observing that she was faithful to her old habit of not having her furnace lighted until long after every one else. Miss Daintry had her own habits, and she was the only person her sister-in-law knew who had more reasons than herself. Her taste was of the old fashion, and her drawing-room embraced neither festoons nor Persian rugs, nor plates and *plaques* upon the wall, nor faded stuffs suspended from unexpected projections. Most of the articles it contained dated from the year 1830 ; and a sensible, reasonable, rectangular arrangement of them abundantly answered to their owner's conception of the decorative. A rosewood sofa against the wall, surmounted by an engraving from Kaulbach ; a neatly drawn carpet, faded, but little worn, and



sprigged with a floral figure ; a chimney-piece of black marble, veined with yellow, garnished with an empire clock and antiquated lamps ; half-a-dozen large mirrors, with very narrow frames ; and an immense glazed screen representing, in the livid tints of early worsted-work, a ruined temple overhanging a river—these were some of the more obvious of Miss Daintry's treasures. Her sister-in-law was a votary of the newer school, and had made sacrifices to have everything in black and gilt ; but she could not fail to see that Lucretia had some very good pieces. It was a wonder how she made them last, for Lucretia had never been supposed to know much about the keeping of a house, and no one would have thought of asking her how she treated the marble floor of her vestibule, or what measures she took in the spring with regard to her curtains. Her work in life lay outside. She took an interest in questions and institutions, sat on committees, and had views on Female Suffrage—a movement which she strongly opposed. She even wrote letters sometimes to the *Transcript*, not “chatty” and jocular, and signed with a fancy name, but “over” her initials, as the phrase was—every one recognised them—and bearing on some important topic. She was not, however, in the faintest degree slipshod or dishevelled, like some of the ladies of the newspaper and the forum ; she had no ink on her fingers, and she wore her bonnet as scientifically poised as the dome of the State House. When you rang at her door-bell you were never kept waiting, and when you entered her dwelling you were not greeted with those culinary odours which, pervading halls and parlours, had in certain other cases been described as the right smell in the wrong place. If Mrs. Daintry was made to wait some time before her hostess appeared, there was nothing extraordinary in this, for none of her friends came down directly, and she never did herself. To come down directly would

have seemed to her to betray a frivolous eagerness for the social act. The delay, moreover, not only gave her, as I have said, opportunity to turn over her errand afresh, but enabled her to say to herself, as she had often said before, that though Lucretia had no taste, she had some very good things, and to wonder both how she had kept them so well, and how she had originally got them. Mrs. Daintry knew that they proceeded from her mother and her aunts, who had been supposed to distribute among the children of the second generation the accumulations of the old house in Federal Street, where many Daintrys had been born in the early part of the century. Of course she knew nothing of the principles on which the distribution had been made, but all she could say was that Lucretia had evidently been first in the field. There was apparently no limit to what had come to her. Mrs. Daintry was not obliged to look, to assure herself that there was another clock in the back parlour—which would seem to indicate that all the clocks had fallen to Lucretia. She knew of four other timepieces in other parts of the house, for of course in former years she had often been upstairs ; it was only in comparatively recent times that she had renounced that practice. There had been a period when she ascended to the second story as a matter of course, without asking leave. On seeing that her sister-in-law was in neither of the parlours, she mounted and talked with Lucretia at the door of her bedroom, if it happened to be closed. And there had been another season when she stood at the foot of the staircase, and, lifting her voice, inquired of Miss Daintry—who called down with some shrillness in return—whether she might climb, while the maid-servant, wandering away with a vague cachinnation, left her to her own devices. But both of these phases belonged to the past. Lucretia never came into *her* bedroom to-day, nor did she presume to penetrate into



Lucretia's ; so that she did not know for a long time whether she had renewed her chintz nor whether she had hung in that bower the large photograph of Florimond, presented by Mrs. Daintry herself to his aunt, which had been placed in neither of the parlours. Mrs. Daintry would have given a good deal to know whether this memento had been honoured with a place in her sister-in-law's "chamber"—it was by this name, on each side, that these ladies designated their sleeping-apartment ; but she could not bring herself to ask directly, for it would be embarrassing to learn—what was possible—that Lucretia had not paid the highest respect to Florimond's portrait. The point was cleared up by its being revealed to her accidentally that the photograph—an expensive and very artistic one, taken in Paris—had been relegated to the spare-room, or guest-chamber. Miss Daintry was very hospitable, and constantly had friends of her own sex staying with her. They were very apt to be young women in their twenties ; and one of them had remarked to Mrs. Daintry that her son's portrait—he must be wonderfully handsome—was the first thing she saw when she woke up in the morning. Certainly Florimond was handsome ; but his mother had a lurking suspicion that, in spite of his beauty, his aunt was not fond of him. She doubtless thought he ought to come back and settle down in Boston ; he was the first of the Daintrys who had had so much in common with Paris. Mrs. Daintry knew as a fact that, twenty-eight years before, Lucretia, whose opinions even at that period were already wonderfully formed, had not approved of the romantic name which, in a moment of pardonable weakness, she had conferred upon her rosy babe. The spinster (she had been as much of a spinster at twenty as she was to-day) had accused her of making a fool of the child. Every one was reading old ballads in Boston then, and Mrs. Daintry had

found the name in a ballad. It doubled any anxiety she might feel with regard to her present business to think that, as certain foreign newspapers which her son sent her used to say about ambassadors, Florimond was perhaps not a *persona grata* to his aunt. She reflected, however, that if his fault were in his absenting himself, there was nothing that would remedy it so effectively as his coming home. She reflected, too, that if she and Lucretia no longer took liberties with each other, there was still something a little indiscreet in her purpose this morning. But it fortified and consoled her for everything to remember, as she sat looking at the empire clock, which was a very handsome one, that her husband at least had been disinterested.

Miss Daintry found her visitor in this attitude, and thought it was an expression of impatience ; which led her to explain that she had been on the roof of her house with a man who had come to see about repairing it. She had walked all over it, and peeped over the cornice, and not been in the least dizzy ; and had come to the conclusion that one ought to know a great deal more about one's roof than was usual.

" I am sure you have never been over yours," she said to her sister-in-law.

Mrs. Daintry confessed with some embarrassment that she had not, and felt, as she did so, that she was superficial and slothful. It annoyed her to reflect that while she supposed, in her new house, she had thought of everything, she had not thought of this important feature. There was no one like Lucretia for giving one such reminders.

" I will send Florimond up when he comes," she said ; " he will tell me all about it."

" Do you suppose he knows about roofs, except tumbledown ones, in his little pictures ? I am afraid it will make him giddy." This had been Miss Daintry's rejoinder, and the tone of it was not altogether re-

assuring. She was nearly fifty years old ; she had a plain, fresh, delightful face, and in whatever part of the world she might have been met, an attentive observer of American life would not have had the least difficulty in guessing what phase of it she represented. She represented the various and enlightened activities which cast their rapid shuttle—in the comings and goings of eager workers—from one side to the other of Boston Common. She had in an eminent degree the physiognomy, the accent, the costume, the conscience, and the little eyeglass, of her native place. She had never sacrificed to the graces, but she inspired unlimited confidence. Moreover, if she was thoroughly in sympathy with the New England capital, she reserved her liberty ; she had a great charity, but she was independent and witty ; and if she was as earnest as other people, she was not quite so serious. Her voice was a little masculine ; and it had been said of her that she didn't care in the least how she looked. This was far from true, for she would not for the world have looked better than she thought was right for so plain a woman.

Mrs. Daintry was fond of calculating consequences ; but she was not a coward, and she arrived at her business as soon as possible.

" You know that Florimond sails on the 20th of this month. He will get home by the 1st of December."

" Oh yes, my dear, I know it ; everybody is talking about it. I have heard it thirty times. That's where Boston is so small," Lucretia Daintry remarked.

" Well, it's big enough for me," said her sister-in-law. " And of course people notice his coming back ; it shows that everything that has been said is false, and that he really does like us."

" He likes his mother, I hope ; about the rest I don't know that it matters."

" Well, it certainly will be pleasant to have him,"

## A NEW ENGLAND WINTER

said Mrs. Daintry, who was not content with her companion's tone, and wished to extract from her some recognition of the importance of Florimond's advent. "It will prove how unjust so much of the talk has been."

"My dear woman, I don't know anything about the talk. We make too much fuss about everything. Florimond was an infant when I last saw him."

This was open to the interpretation that too much fuss had been made about Florimond—an idea that accorded ill with the project that had kept Mrs. Daintry waiting a quarter of an hour while her hostess walked about on the roof. But Miss Daintry continued, and in a moment gave her sister-in-law the best opportunity she could have hoped for. "I don't suppose he will bring with him either salvation or the other thing; and if he has decided to winter among the bears, it will matter much more to him than to any one else. But I shall be very glad to see him if he behaves himself; and I needn't tell you that if there is anything I can do for him——" and Miss Daintry, tightening her lips together a little, paused, suiting her action to the idea that professions were usually humbug.

"There is indeed something you can do for him," her sister-in-law hastened to respond; "or something you can do for me, at least," she added, more discreetly.

"Call it for both of you. What is it?" and Miss Daintry put on her eyeglass.

"I know you like to do kindnesses, when they are *real* ones; and you almost always have some one staying with you for the winter."

Miss Daintry stared. "Do you want to put him to live with me?"

"No, indeed! Do you think I could part with him? It's another person—a lady!"

"A lady! Is he going to bring a woman with him?"

"My dear Lucretia, you won't wait. I want to make it as pleasant for him as possible. In that case he may stay longer. He has promised three months; but I should so like to keep him till the summer. It would make me very happy."

"Well, my dear, keep him, then, if you can."

"But I can't, unless I am helped."

"And you want me to help you? Tell me what I must do. Should you wish me to make love to him?"

Mrs. Daintry's hesitation at this point was almost as great as if she had found herself obliged to say yes. She was well aware that what she had come to suggest was very delicate; but it seemed to her at the present moment more delicate than ever. Still, her cause was good, because it was the cause of maternal devotion. "What I should like you to do would be to ask Rachel Torrance to spend the winter with you."

Miss Daintry had not sat so much on committees without getting used to queer proposals, and she had long since ceased to waste time in expressing a vain surprise. Her method was Socratic; she usually entangled her interlocutor in a net of questions.

"Ah, do you want *her* to make love to him?"

"No, I don't want any love at all. In such a matter as that I want Florimond to be perfectly free. But Rachel is such an attractive girl; she is so artistic and so bright."

"I don't doubt it; but I can't invite all the attractive girls in the country. Why don't you ask her yourself?"

"It would be too marked. And then Florimond might not like her in the same house; he would have too much of her. Besides, she is no relation of mine, you know; the cousinship—such as it is, it is not very close—is on your side. I have reason to believe she

would like to come ; she knows so little of Boston, and admires it so much. It is astonishing how little idea the New York people have. She would be different from any one here, and that would make a pleasant change for Florimond. She was in Europe so much when she was young. She speaks French perfectly, and Italian, I think, too ; and she was brought up in a kind of artistic way. Her father never did anything ; but even when he hadn't bread to give his children, he always arranged to have a studio, and they gave musical parties. That's the way Rachel was brought up. But they tell me that it hasn't in the least spoiled her ; it has only made her very familiar with life."

"Familiar with rubbish !" Miss Daintry ejaculated.

"My dear Lucretia, I assure you she is a very good girl, or I never would have proposed such a plan as this. She paints very well herself, and tries to sell her pictures. They are dreadfully poor—I don't mean the pictures, but Mrs. Torrance and the rest—and they live in Brooklyn, in some second-rate boarding-house. With that, Rachel has everything about her that would enable her to appreciate Boston. Of course it would be a real kindness, because there would be one less to pay for at the boarding-house. You haven't a son, so you can't understand how a mother feels. I want to prepare everything, to have everything pleasantly arranged. I want to deprive him of every pretext for going away before the summer ; because in August—I don't know whether I have told you—I have a kind of idea of going back with him myself. I am so afraid he will miss the artistic side. I don't mind saying that to you, Lucretia, for I have heard you say yourself that you thought it had been left out here. Florimond might go and see Rachel Torrance every day if he liked ; of course, being his cousin, and calling her Rachel, it couldn't attract any



particular attention. I shouldn't much care if it did," Mrs. Daintry went on, borrowing a certain bravado that in calmer moments was eminently foreign to her nature from the impunity with which she had hitherto proceeded. Her project, as she heard herself unfold it, seemed to hang together so well that she felt something of the intoxication of success. "I shouldn't care if it did," she repeated, "so long as Florimond had a little of the conversation that he is accustomed to, and I was not in perpetual fear of his starting off."

Miss Daintry had listened attentively while her sister-in-law spoke, with eager softness, passing from point to point with a *crescendo* of lucidity, like a woman who had thought it all out and had the consciousness of many reasons on her side. There had been momentary pauses, of which Lucretia had not taken advantage, so that Mrs. Daintry rested at last in the enjoyment of a security that was almost complete and that her companion's first question was not of a nature to dispel.

"It's so long since I have seen her. Is she pretty?" Miss Daintry inquired.

"She is decidedly striking; she has magnificent hair!" her visitor answered, almost with enthusiasm.

"Do you want Florimond to marry her?"

This, somehow, was less pertinent. "Ah no, my dear," Mrs. Daintry rejoined, very judiciously. "That is not the kind of education—the kind of *milieu*—one would wish for the wife of one's son." She knew, moreover, that her sister-in-law knew her opinion about the marriage of young people. It was a sacrament more high and holy than any words could express, the propriety and timeliness of which lay deep in the hearts of the contracting parties, below all interference from parents and friends; it was an inspiration from above, and she would no more have

thought of laying a train to marry her son than she would have thought of breaking open his letters. More relevant even than this, however, was the fact that she did not believe he would wish to make a wife of a girl from a slipshod family in Brooklyn, however little he might care to lose sight of the artistic side. It will be observed that she gave Florimond the credit of being a very discriminating young man ; and she indeed discriminated for him in cases in which she would not have presumed to discriminate for herself.

" My dear Susan, you are simply the most immoral woman in Boston ! " These were the words of which, after a moment, her sister-in-law delivered herself.

Mrs. Daintry turned a little pale. " Don't you think it would be right ? " she asked quickly.

" To sacrifice the poor girl to Florimond's amusement ? What has she done that you should wish to play her such a trick ? " Miss Daintry did not look shocked : she never looked shocked, for even when she was annoyed she was never frightened ; but after a moment she broke into a loud, uncompromising laugh—a laugh which her sister-in-law knew of old and regarded as a peculiarly dangerous form of criticism.

" I don't see why she should be sacrificed. She would have a lovely time if she were to come on. She would consider it the greatest kindness to be asked."

" To be asked to come and amuse Florimond."

Mrs. Daintry hesitated a moment. " I don't see why she should object to that. Florimond is certainly not beneath a person's notice. Why, Lucretia, you speak as if there were something disagreeable about Florimond."

" My dear Susan," said Miss Daintry, " I am willing to believe that he is the first young man of his time ; but, all the same, it isn't a thing to do."



## A NEW ENGLAND WINTER

"Well, I have thought of it in every possible way, and I haven't seen any harm in it. It isn't as if she were giving up anything to come."

"You have thought of it too much, perhaps. Stop thinking for a while. I should have imagined you were more scrupulous."

Mrs. Daintry was silent a moment ; she took her sister-in-law's asperity very meekly, for she felt that if she had been wrong in what she proposed she deserved a severe judgement. But why was she wrong? She clasped her hands in her lap and rested her eyes with extreme seriousness upon Lucretia's little *pince-nez*, inviting her to judge her, and too much interested in having the question of her culpability settled to care whether or no she were hurt. "It is very hard to know what is right," she said presently. "Of course it is only a plan ; I wondered how it would strike you."

"You had better leave Florimond alone," Miss Daintry answered. "I don't see why you should spread so many carpets for him. Let him shift for himself. If he doesn't like Boston, Boston can spare him."

"You are not nice about him ; no, you are not, Lucretia !" Mrs. Daintry cried, with a slight tremor in her voice.

"Of course I am not as nice as you—he is not my son ; but I am trying to be nice about Rachel Torrance."

"I am sure she would like him—she would delight in him !" Mrs. Daintry broke out.

"That's just what I'm afraid of ; I couldn't stand that."

"Well, Lucretia, I am not convinced," Mrs. Daintry said, rising, with perceptible coldness. "It is very hard to be sure one is not unjust. Of course I shall not expect you to send for her ; but I shall

think of her with a good deal of compassion, all winter, in that dingy place in Brooklyn. And if you have some one else with you—and I am sure you will, because you always do, unless you remain alone on purpose this year, to put me in the wrong—if you have some one else I shall keep saying to myself: ‘ Well, after all, it might have been Rachel ! ’ ”

Miss Daintry gave another of her loud laughs at the idea that she might remain alone “ on purpose.” “ I shall have a visitor, but it will be some one who will not amuse Florimond in the least. If he wants to go away, it won’t be for anything in this house that he will stay.”

“ I really don’t see why you should hate him,” said poor Mrs. Daintry.

“ Where do you find that ? On the contrary, I appreciate him very highly. That’s just why I think it very possible that a girl like Rachel Torrance—an odd, uninstructed girl, who hasn’t had great advantages—may fall in love with him and break her heart.”

Mrs. Daintry’s clear eyes expanded. “ Is *that* what you are afraid of ? ”

“ Do you suppose my solicitude is for Florimond ? An accident of that sort—if she were to show him her heels at the end—might perhaps do him good. But I am thinking of the girl, since you say you don’t want him to marry her.”

“ It was not for that that I suggested what I did. I don’t want him to marry any one—I have no plans for that,” Mrs. Daintry said, as if she were resenting an imputation.

“ Rachel Torrance least of all ! ” And Miss Daintry indulged still again in that hilarity, so personal to herself, which sometimes made the subject look so little jocular to others. “ My dear Susan, I don’t blame you,” she said ; “ for I suppose mothers are

necessarily unscrupulous. But that is why the rest of us should hold them in check."

"It's merely an assumption, that she would fall in love with him," Mrs. Daintry continued, with a certain majesty; "there is nothing to prove it, and I am not bound to take it for granted."

"In other words, you don't care if she should! Precisely; that, I suppose, is your *rôle*. I am glad I haven't any children; it is very sophisticating. For so good a woman, you are very bad. Yes, you *are* good, Susan; and you *are* bad."

"I don't know that I pretend to be particularly good," Susan remarked, with the warmth of one who had known something of the burden of such a reputation, as she moved toward the door.

"You have a conscience, and it will wake up," her companion returned. "It will come over you in the watches of the night that your idea was—as I have said—immoral."

Mrs. Daintry paused in the hall, and stood there looking at Lucretia. It was just possible that she was being laughed at, for Lucretia's deepest mirth was sometimes silent—that is, one heard the laughter several days later. Suddenly she coloured to the roots of her hair, as if the conviction of her error had come over her. Was it possible she had been corrupted by an affection in itself so pure? "I only want to do right," she said softly. "I would rather he should never come home than that I should go too far."

She was turning away, but her sister-in-law held her a moment and kissed her. "You are a delightful woman, but I won't ask Rachel Torrance!" This was the understanding on which they separated.

### III

MISS DAINTRY, after her visitor had left her, recognised that she had been a little brutal ; for Susan's proposition did not really strike her as so heinous. Her eagerness to protect the poor girl in Brooklyn was not a very positive quantity, inasmuch as she had an impression that this young lady was on the whole very well able to take care of herself. What her talk with Mrs. Daintry had really expressed was the lukewarmness of her sentiment with regard to Florimond. She had no wish to help his mother lay carpets for him, as she said. Rightly or wrongly, she had a conviction that he was selfish, that he was spoiled, that he was conceited ; and she thought Lucretia Daintry meant for better things than the service of sugaring for the young man's lips the pill of a long-deferred visit to Boston. It was quite indifferent to her that he should be conscious, in that city, of unsatisfied needs. At bottom, she had never forgiven him for having sought another way of salvation. Moreover, she had a strong sense of humour, and it amused her more than a little that her sister-in-law—of all women in Boston—should have come to her on that particular errand. It completed the irony of the situation that one should frighten Mrs. Daintry—just a little—about what she had undertaken ; and more than once that day Lucretia had, with a smile, the vision of Susan's

countenance as she remarked to her that she was immoral. In reality, and speaking seriously, she did not consider Mrs. Daintry's inspiration unpardonable ; what was very positive was simply that she had no wish to invite Rachel Torrance for the benefit of her nephew. She was by no means sure that she should like the girl for her own sake, and it was still less apparent that she should like her for that of Florimond. With all this, however, Miss Daintry had a high love of justice ; she revised her social accounts from time to time to see that she had not cheated any one. She thought over her interview with Mrs. Daintry the next day, and it occurred to her that she had been a little unfair. But she scarcely knew what to do to repair her mistake, by which Rachel Torrance also had suffered, perhaps ; for after all, if it had not been wicked of her sister-in-law to ask such a favour, it had at least been cool ; and the penance that presented itself to Lucretia Daintry did not take the form of despatching a letter to Brooklyn. An accident came to her help, and four days after the conversation I have narrated she wrote her a note which explains itself and which I will presently transcribe. Meanwhile Mrs. Daintry, on her side, had held an examination of her heart ; and though she did not think she had been very civilly treated, the result of her reflexions was to give her a fit of remorse. Lucretia was right : she had been anything but scrupulous ; she had skirted the edge of an abyss. Questions of conduct had long been familiar to her ; and the cardinal rule of life in her eyes was, that before one did anything which involved in any degree the happiness or the interest of another, one should take one's motives out of the closet in which they are usually laid away and give them a thorough airing. This operation, undertaken before her visit to Lucretia, had been

## A NEW ENGLAND WINTER

cursory and superficial ; for now that she repeated it, she discovered among the recesses of her spirit a number of nut-like scruples which she was astonished to think she should have overlooked. She had really been very wicked, and there was no doubt about *her* proper penance. It consisted of a letter to her sister-in-law, in which she completely disavowed her little project, attributing it to momentary intermission of her reason. She saw it would never do, and she was quite ashamed of herself. She did not exactly thank Miss Daintry for the manner in which she had admonished her, but she spoke as one saved from a great danger, and assured her relative of Mount Vernon Place that she should not soon again expose herself. This letter crossed with Miss Daintry's missive, which ran as follows :—

MY DEAR SUSAN—I have been thinking over our conversation of last Tuesday, and I am afraid I went rather too far in my condemnation of your idea with regard to Rachel Torrance. If I expressed myself in a manner to wound your feelings, I can assure you of my great regret. Nothing could have been further from my thoughts than the belief that you are wanting in delicacy. I know very well that you were prompted by the highest sense of duty. It is possible, however, I think, that your sense of duty to poor Florimond is a little too high. You think of him too much as that famous dragon of antiquity—wasn't it in Crete, or somewhere?—to whom young virgins had to be sacrificed. It may relieve your mind, however, to hear that this particular virgin will probably, during the coming winter, be provided for. Yesterday, at Doll's, where I had gone in to look at the new pictures (there is a striking Appleton Brown), I met Pauline Mesh, whom I had not seen for ages, and had half an hour's talk with her. She seems to me to have come out very much this winter, and to have altogether a higher tone. In short, she is much enlarged, and seems to want to take an interest in some-



## A NEW ENGLAND WINTER

thing. Of course you will say : Has she not her children ? But, somehow, they don't seem to fill her life. You must remember that they are very small as yet to fill anything. Anyway, she mentioned to me her great disappointment in having had to give up her sister, who was to have come on from Baltimore to spend the greater part of the winter. Rosalie is very pretty, and Pauline expected to give a lot of Germans, and make things generally pleasant. I shouldn't wonder if she thought something might happen that would make Rosalie a fixture in our city. She would have liked this immensely ; for, whatever Pauline's faults may be, she has plenty of family feeling. But her sister has suddenly got engaged in Baltimore (I believe it's much easier than here), so that the visit has fallen through. Pauline seemed to be quite in despair, for she had made all sorts of beautifications in one of her rooms, on purpose for Rosalie ; and not only had she wasted her labour (you know how she goes into those things, whatever we may think, sometimes, of her taste), but she spoke as if it would make a great difference in her winter ; said she should suffer a great deal from loneliness. She says Boston is no place for a married woman, standing on her own merits ; she can't have any sort of time unless she hitches herself to some attractive girl who will help her to pull the social car. You know that isn't what every one says, and how much talk there has been the last two or three winters about the frisky young matrons. Well, however that may be, I don't pretend to know much about it, not being in the married set. Pauline spoke as if she were really quite high and dry, and I felt so sorry for her that it suddenly occurred to me to say something about Rachel Torrance. I remembered that she is related to Donald Mesh in about the same degree as she is to me—a degree nearer, therefore, than to Florimond. Pauline didn't seem to think much of the relationship—it's so remote ; but when I told her that Rachel (strange as it might appear) would probably be thankful for a season in Boston, and might be a good



## A NEW ENGLAND WINTER

substitute for Rosalie, why she quite jumped at the idea. She has never seen her, but she knows who she is—fortunately, for I could never begin to explain. She seems to think such a girl will be quite a novelty in this place. I don't suppose Pauline can do her any particular harm, from what you tell me of Miss Torrance; and, on the other hand, I don't know that she could injure Pauline. She is certainly very kind (Pauline, of course), and I have no doubt she will immediately write to Brooklyn, and that Rachel will come on. Florimond won't, of course, see as much of her as if she were staying with me, and I don't know that he will particularly care about Pauline Mesh, who, you know, is intensely American; but they will go out a great deal, and he will meet them (if he takes the trouble), and I have no doubt that Rachel will take the edge off the east wind for him. At any rate I have perhaps done her a good turn. I must confess to you—and it won't surprise you—that I was thinking of her, and not of him, when I spoke to Pauline. Therefore I don't feel that I have taken a risk, but I don't much care if I have. I have my views, but I never worry. I recommend you not to do so either—for you go, I know, from one extreme to the other. I have told you my little story; it was on my mind. Aren't you glad to see the lovely snow?—Ever affectionately yours,

L. D.

*P.S.*—The more I think of it, the more convinced I am that you *will* worry now about the danger for Rachel. Why did I drop the poison into your mind? Of course I didn't say a word about you or Florimond.

This epistle reached Mrs. Daintry, as I have intimated, about an hour after her letter to her sister-in-law had been posted; but it is characteristic of her that she did not for a moment regret having made a retractation rather humble in form, and which proved, after all, scarcely to have been needed. The delight of having done that duty carried her over the sense of having given herself away. Her

sister-in-law spoke from knowledge when she wrote that phrase about Susan's now beginning to worry from the opposite point of view. Her conscience, like the good Homer, might sometimes nod ; but when it woke, it woke with a start ; and for many a day afterward its vigilance was feverish. For the moment her emotions were mingled. She thought Lucretia very strange, and that *she* was scarcely in a position to talk about one's going from one extreme to the other. It was good news to her that Rachel Torrance would probably be on the ground after all, and she was delighted that on Lucretia the responsibility of such a fact should rest. This responsibility, even after her revulsion, as we know, she regarded as grave ; she exhaled an almost voluptuous sigh when she thought of having herself escaped from it. What she did not quite understand was Lucretia's apology, and her having, even if Florimond's happiness were not her motive, taken almost the very step which three days before she had so severely criticised. This was puzzling, for Lucretia was usually so consistent. But all the same Mrs. Daintry did not repent of her own penance ; on the contrary, she took more and more comfort in it. If, with that, Rachel Torrance should be really useful, it would be delightful.

#### IV

FLORIMOND DAINTRY had stayed at home for three days after his arrival ; he had sat close to the fire, in his slippers, every now and then casting a glance over his shoulders at the hard white world which seemed to glare at him from the other side of the window-panes. He was very much afraid of the cold, and he was not in a hurry to go out and meet it. He had met it, on disembarking in New York, in the shape of a wave of frozen air, which had travelled from some remote point in the West (he was told), on purpose, apparently, to smite him in the face. That portion of his organism tingled yet with it, though the gasping, bewildered look which sat upon his features during the first few hours had quite left it. I am afraid it will be thought he was a young man of small courage ; and on a point so delicate I do not hold myself obliged to pronounce. It is only fair to add that it was delightful to him to be with his mother and that they easily spent three days in talking. Moreover he had the company of Joanna and her children, who, after a little delay, occasioned apparently by their waiting to see whether he would not first come to them, had arrived in a body and had spent several hours. As regards the majority of them, they had repeated this visit several times in the three days, Joanna being obliged to remain at home with the two younger ones. There were four older ones, and their grandmother's house was open to them

as a second nursery. The first day, their Uncle Florimond thought them charming ; and, as he had brought a French toy for each, it is probable that this impression was mutual. The second day, their little ruddy bodies and woollen clothes seemed to him to have a positive odour of the cold—it was disagreeable to him, and he spoke to his mother about their “wintry smell.” The third day they had become very familiar ; they called him “Florry” ; and he had made up his mind that, to let them loose in that way on his mother, Joanna must be rather wanting in delicacy—not mentioning this deficiency, however, as yet, for he saw that his mother was not prepared for it. She evidently thought it proper, or at least it seemed inevitable, that either she should be round at Joanna’s or the children should be round in Newbury Street ; for “Joanna’s” evidently represented primarily the sound of small, loud voices, and the hard breathing that signalised the intervals of romps. Florimond was rather disappointed in his sister, seeing her after a long separation ; he remarked to his mother that she seemed completely submerged. As Mrs. Daintry spent most of her time under the waves with her daughter, she had grown to regard this element as sufficiently favourable to life, and was rather surprised when Florimond said to her that he was sorry to see she and his sister appeared to have been converted into a pair of *bonnes d’enfants*. Afterward, however, she perceived what he meant ; she was not aware, until he called her attention to it, that the little Merrimans took up an enormous place in the intellectual economy of two households. “You ought to remember that they exist for you, and not you for them,” Florimond said to her in a tone of friendly admonition ; and he remarked on another occasion that the perpetual presence of children was a great injury to conversation—it kept it down so much ;

and that in Boston they seemed to be present even when they were absent, inasmuch as most of the talk was about them. Mrs. Daintry did not stop to ask herself what her son knew of Boston, leaving it years before, as a boy, and not having so much as looked out of the window since his return ; she was taken up mainly with noting certain little habits of speech which he evidently had formed, and in wondering how they would strike his fellow-citizens. He was very definite and trenchant ; he evidently knew perfectly what he thought ; and though his manner was not defiant—he had, perhaps, even too many of the forms of politeness, as if sometimes, for mysterious reasons, he were playing upon you—the tone in which he uttered his opinions did not appear exactly to give you the choice. And then apparently he had a great many ; there was a moment when Mrs. Daintry vaguely foresaw that the little house in Newbury Street would be more crowded with Florimond's views than it had ever been with Joanna's children. She hoped very much people would like him, and she hardly could see why they should fail to find him agreeable. To herself he was sweeter than any grandchild ; he was as kind as if he had been a devoted parent. Florimond had but a small acquaintance with his brother-in-law ; but after he had been at home forty-eight hours he found that he bore Arthur Merriman a grudge, and was ready to think rather ill of him—having a theory that he ought to have held up Joanna and interposed to save her mother. Arthur Merriman was a young and brilliant commission-merchant, who had not married Joanna Daintry for the sake of Florimond, and, doing an active business all day in East Boston, had a perfectly good conscience in leaving his children's mother and grandmother to establish their terms of intercourse.

Florimond, however, did not particularly wonder

why his brother-in-law had not been round to bid him welcome. It was for Mrs. Daintry that this anxiety was reserved ; and what made it worse was her uncertainty as to whether she should be justified in mentioning the subject to Joanna. It might wound Joanna to suggest to her that her husband was derelict—especially if she did not think so, and she certainly gave her mother no opening ; and on the other hand Florimond might have ground for complaint if Arthur should continue not to notice him. Mrs. Daintry earnestly desired that nothing of this sort should happen, and took refuge in the hope that Florimond would have adopted the foreign theory of visiting, in accordance with which the newcomer was to present himself first. Meanwhile the young man, who had looked upon a meeting with his brother-in-law as a necessity rather than a privilege, was simply conscious of a reprieve ; and up in Clarendon Street, as Mrs. Daintry said, it never occurred to Arthur Merriman to take this social step, nor to his wife to propose it to him. Mrs. Merriman simply took for granted that her brother would be round early some morning to see the children. A day or two later the couple dined at her mother's, and that virtually settled the question. It is true that Mrs. Daintry, in later days, occasionally recalled the fact that, after all, Joanna's husband never had called upon Florimond ; and she even wondered why Florimond, who sometimes said bitter things, had not made more of it. The matter came back at moments when, under the pressure of circumstances which, it must be confessed, were rare, she found herself giving assent to an axiom that sometimes reached her ears. This axiom, it must be added, did not justify her in the particular case I have mentioned, for the full purport of it was that the queerness of Bostonians was collective, not individual.

There was no doubt, however, that it was Flori-



mond's place to call first upon his aunt, and this was a duty of which she could not hesitate to remind him. By the time he took his way across the long expanse of the new land and up the charming hill which constitutes, as it were, the speaking face of Boston, the temperature either had relaxed, or he had got used, even in his mother's hot little house, to his native air. He breathed the bright cold sunshine with pleasure ; he raised his eyes to the arching blueness, and thought he had never seen a dome so magnificently painted. He turned his head this way and that, as he walked (now that he had recovered his legs, he foresaw that he should walk a good deal), and freely indulged his most valued organ, the organ that had won him such reputation as he already enjoyed. In the little artistic circle in which he moved in Paris, Florimond Daintry was thought to have a great deal of eye. His power of rendering was questioned, his execution had been called pretentious and feeble ; but a conviction had somehow been diffused that he saw things with extraordinary intensity. No one could tell better than he what to paint, and what not to paint, even though his interpretation were sometimes rather too sketchy. It will have been guessed that he was an impressionist ; and it must be admitted that this was the character in which he proceeded on his visit to Miss Daintry. He was constantly shutting one eye, to see the better with the other, making a little telescope by curving one of his hands together, waving these members in the air with vague pictorial gestures, pointing at things which, when people turned to follow his direction, seemed to mock the vulgar vision by eluding it. I do not mean that he practised these devices as he walked along Beacon Street, into which he had crossed shortly after leaving his mother's house ; but now that he had broken the ice he acted quite in the spirit of the reply he had made to a friend



in Paris, shortly before his departure, who asked him why he was going back to America—"I am going to see how it looks." He was of course very conscious of his eye; and his effort to cultivate it was both intuitive and deliberate. He spoke of it freely, as he might have done of a valuable watch or a horse. He was always trying to get the visual impression; asking himself, with regard to such and such an object or a place, of what its "character" would consist. There is no doubt he really saw with great intensity; and the reader will probably feel that he was welcome to this ambiguous privilege. It was not important for him that things should be beautiful; what he sought to discover was their identity—the signs by which he should know them. He began this inquiry as soon as he stepped into Newbury Street from his mother's door, and he was destined to continue it for the first few weeks of his stay in Boston. As time went on, his attention relaxed; for one couldn't do more than see, as he said to his mother and another person; and he had seen. Then the novelty wore off—the novelty which is often so absurdly great in the eyes of the American who returns to his native land after a few years spent in the foreign element—an effect to be accounted for only on the supposition that in the secret parts of his mind he recognises the aspect of life in Europe as, through long heredity, the more familiar; so that superficially, having no interest to oppose it, it quickly supplants the domestic type, which, upon his return, becomes supreme, but with its credit in many cases appreciably and permanently diminished. Florimond painted a few things while he was in America, though he had told his mother he had come home to rest; but when, several months later, in Paris, he showed his "notes," as he called them, to a friend, the young Frenchman asked him if Massachusetts were really so much like Andalusia.

## A NEW ENGLAND WINTER

There was certainly nothing Andalusian in the prospect as Florimond traversed the artificial bosom of the Back Bay. He had made his way promptly into Beacon Street, and he greatly admired that vista. The long straight avenue lay airing its newness in the frosty day, and all its individual façades, with their neat, sharp ornaments, seemed to have been scoured, with a kind of friction, by the hard, salutary light. Their brilliant browns and drabs, their rosy surfaces of brick, made a variety of fresh, violent tones, such as Florimond liked to memorise, and the large clear windows of their curved fronts faced each other, across the street, like candid, inevitable eyes. There was something almost terrible in the windows ; Florimond had forgotten how vast and clean they were, and how, in their sculptured frames, the New England air seemed, like a zealous housewife, to polish and preserve them. A great many ladies were looking out, and groups of children, in the drawing-rooms, were flattening their noses against the transparent plate. Here and there, behind it, the back of a statuette or the symmetry of a painted vase, erect on a pedestal, presented itself to the street, and enabled the passer to construct, more or less, the room within—its frescoed ceilings, its new silk sofas, its untarnished fixtures. This continuity of glass constituted a kind of exposure, within and without, and gave the street the appearance of an enormous corridor in which the public and the private were familiar and intermingled. But it was all very cheerful and commodious, and seemed to speak of diffused wealth, of intimate family life, of comfort constantly renewed. All sorts of things in the region of the temperature had happened during the few days that Florimond had been in the country. The cold wave had spent itself, a snowstorm had come and gone, and the air, after this temporary relaxation, had renewed its keenness. The snow, which had fallen

in but moderate abundance, was heaped along the side of the pavement ; it formed a radiant cornice on the housetops and crowned the windows with a plain white cap. It deepened the colour of everything else, made all surfaces look ruddy, and at a distance sent into the air a thin, delicate mist—a vaporous blur—which occasionally softened an edge. The upper part of Beacon Street seemed to Florimond charming—the long, wide, sunny slope, the uneven line of the older houses, the contrasted, differing, bulging fronts, the painted bricks, the tidy facings, the immaculate doors, the burnished silver plates, the denuded twigs of the far extent of the Common, on the other side ; and to crown the eminence and complete the picture, high in the air, poised in the right place, over everything that clustered below, the most felicitous object in Boston—the gilded dome of the State House. It was in the shadow of this monument, as we know, that Miss Daintry lived ; and Florimond, who was always lucky, had the good fortune to find her at home.

## V

IT may seem that I have assumed on the part of the reader too great a curiosity about the impressions of this young man, who was not very remarkable, and who has not even the recommendation of being the hero of our perhaps too descriptive tale. The reader will already have discovered that a hero fails us here ; but if I go on at all risks to say a few words about Florimond, he will perhaps understand the better why this part has not been filled. Miss Daintry's nephew was not very original ; it was his own illusion that he had in a considerable degree the value of rareness. Even this youthful conceit was not rare, for it was not of heroic proportions, and was liable to lapses and discouragements. He was a fair, slim, civil young man, and you would never have guessed from his appearance that he was an impressionist. He was neat and sleek and quite anti-Bohemian, and in spite of his looking about him as he walked, his figure was much more in harmony with the Boston landscape than he supposed. He was a little vain, a little affected, a little pretentious, a little good-looking, a little amusing, a little spoiled, and at times a little tiresome. If he was disagreeable, however, it was also only a little ; he did not carry anything to a very high pitch ; he was accomplished, industrious, successful—all in the minor degree. He was fond of his mother and fond of himself ; he also liked the people who

liked him. Such people could belong only to the class of good listeners, for Florimond, with the least encouragement (he was very susceptible to that), would chatter by the hour. As he was very observant, and knew a great many stories, his talk was often entertaining, especially to women, many of whom thought him wonderfully sympathetic. It may be added that he was still very young and fluid, and neither his defects nor his virtues had a great consistency. He was fond of the society of women, and had an idea that he knew a great deal about that element of humanity. He believed himself to know everything about art, and almost everything about life, and he expressed himself as much as possible in the phrases that are current in studios. He spoke French very well, and it had rubbed off on his English.

His aunt listened to him attentively, with her nippers on her nose. She had been a little restless at first, and, to relieve herself, had vaguely punched the sofa-cushion which lay beside her—a gesture that her friends always recognised; they knew it to express a particular emotion. Florimond, whose egotism was candid and confiding, talked for an hour about himself—about what he had done, and what he intended to do, what he had said and what had been said to him; about his habits, tastes, achievements, peculiarities, which were apparently so numerous; about the decorations of his studio in Paris; about the character of the French, the works of Zola, the theory of art for art, the American type, the “stupidity” of his mother’s new house—though of course it had some things that were knowing—the pronunciation of Joanna’s children, the effect of the commission-business on Arthur Merriman’s conversation, the effect of everything on his mother, Mrs. Daintry, and the effect of Mrs. Daintry on her son Florimond. The young man had an epithet which he constantly intro-

duced to express disapproval ; when he spoke of the architecture of his mother's house, over which she had taken great pains (she remembered the gabled fronts of Nuremberg), he said that a certain effect had been dreadfully missed, that the character of the doorway was simply " crass." He expressed, however, a lively sense of the bright cleanness of American interiors. " Oh, as for that," he said, " the place is kept—it's kept ;" and, to give an image of this idea, he put his gathered fingers to his lips an instant, seemed to kiss them or blow upon them, and then opened them into the air. Miss Daintry had never encountered this gesture before ; she had heard it described by travelled persons ; but to see her own nephew in the very act of it led her to administer another thump to the sofa-cushion. She finally got this article under control, and sat more quiet, with her hands clasped upon it, while her visitor continued to discourse. In pursuance of his character as an impressionist, he gave her a great many impressions ; but it seemed to her that as he talked, he simply exposed himself—exposed his egotism, his little pretensions. Lucretia Daintry, as we know, had a love of justice, and though her opinions were apt to be very positive, her charity was great and her judgements were not harsh ; moreover, there was in her composition not a drop of acrimony. Nevertheless, she was, as the phrase is, rather hard on poor little Florimond ; and to explain her severity we are bound to assume that in the past he had in some way offended her. To-day, at any rate, it seemed to her that he patronised his maiden-aunt. He scarcely asked about her health, but took for granted on her part an unlimited interest in his own sensations. It came over her afresh that his mother had been absurd in thinking that the usual resources of Boston would not have sufficed to maintain him ; and she smiled a



little grimly at the idea that a special provision should have been made. This idea presently melted into another, over which she was free to regale herself only after her nephew had departed. For the moment she contented herself with saying to him, when a pause in his young eloquence gave her a chance—"You will have a great many people to go and see. You pay the penalty of being a Bostonian; you have several hundred cousins. One pays for everything."

Florimond lifted his eyebrows. "I pay for that every day of my life. Have I got to go and see them all?"

"All—every one," said his aunt, who in reality did not hold this obligation in the least sacred.

"And to say something agreeable to them all?" the young man went on.

"Oh no, that is not necessary," Miss Daintry rejoined, with more exactness. "There are one or two, however, who always appreciate a pretty speech." She added in an instant, "Do you remember Mrs. Mesh?"

"Mrs. Mesh?" Florimond apparently did not remember.

"The wife of Donald Mesh; your grandfathers were first cousins. I don't mean her grandfather, but her husband's. If you don't remember her, I suppose he married her after you went away."

"I remember Donald; but I never knew he was a relation. He was single then, I think."

"Well, he's double now," said Miss Daintry; "he's triple, I may say, for there are two ladies in the house."

"If you mean he's a polygamist—are there Mormons even here?" Florimond, leaning back in his chair, with his elbow on the arm, and twisting with his gloved fingers the point of a small fair moustache, did not appear to have been arrested by this account of Mr. Mesh's household; for he almost immediately



asked, in a large, detached way—"Are there any nice women here?"

"It depends on what you mean by nice women; there are some very sharp ones."

"Oh, I don't like sharp ones," Florimond remarked, in a tone which made his aunt long to throw her sofa-cushion at his head. "Are there any pretty ones?"

She looked at him a moment, hesitating. "Rachel Torrance is pretty, in a strange, unusual way—black hair and blue eyes, a serpentine figure, old coins in her tresses; that sort of thing."

"I have seen a good deal of that sort of thing," said Florimond, abstractedly.

"That I know nothing about. I mention Pauline Mesh's as one of the houses that you ought to go to, and where I know you are expected."

"I remember now that my mother has said something about that. But who is the woman with coins in her hair?—what has she to do with Pauline Mesh?"

"Rachel is staying with her; she came from New York a week ago, and I believe she means to spend the winter. She isn't a woman, she's a girl."

"My mother didn't speak of her," said Florimond; "but I don't think she would recommend me a girl with a serpentine figure."

"Very likely not," Miss Daintry answered, dryly. "Rachel Torrance is a far-away cousin of Donald Mesh, and consequently of mine and of yours. She's an artist, like yourself; she paints flowers on little panels and plaques."

"Like myself?—I never painted a plaque in my life!" exclaimed Florimond, staring.

"Well, she's a model also; you can paint her if you like; she has often been painted, I believe."

Florimond had begun to caress the other tip of his

moustache. "I don't care for women who have been painted before. I like to find them out. Besides, I want to rest this winter."

His aunt was disappointed ; she wished to put him into relation with Rachel Torrance, and his indifference was an obstacle. The meeting was sure to take place sooner or later, but she would have him glad to precipitate it, and, above all, to quicken her nephew's susceptibilities. "Take care you are not found out yourself!" she exclaimed, tossing away her sofa-cushion and getting up.

Florimond did not see what she meant, and he accordingly bore her no rancour ; but when, before he took his leave, he said to her, rather irrelevantly, that if he should find himself in the mood during his stay in Boston, he should like to do her portrait—she had such a delightful face—she almost thought the speech a deliberate impertinence. "Do you mean that you have discovered me—that no one has suspected it before?" she inquired with a laugh, and a little flush in the countenance that he was so good as to appreciate.

Florimond replied, with perfect coolness and good-nature, that he didn't know about this, but that he was sure no one had seen her in just the way he saw her ; and he waved his hand in the air with strange circular motions, as if to evoke before him the image of a canvas, with a figure just rubbed in. He repeated this gesture, or something very like it, by way of farewell, when he quitted his aunt, and she thought him insufferably patronising.

This is why she wished him, without loss of time, to make the acquaintance of Rachel Torrance, whose treatment of his pretensions she thought would be salutary. It may now be communicated to the reader—after a delay proportionate to the momentousness of the fact—that this had been the idea which

suddenly flowered in her brain, as she sat face to face with her irritating young visitor. It had vaguely shaped itself after her meeting with that strange girl from Brooklyn, whom Mrs. Mesh, all gratitude—for she liked strangeness—promptly brought to see her; and her present impression of her nephew rapidly completed it. She had not expected to take an interest in Rachel Torrance, and could not see why, through a freak of Susan's, she should have been called upon to think so much about her; but, to her surprise, she perceived that Mrs. Daintry's proposed victim was not the usual forward girl. She perceived at the same time that it had been ridiculous to think of Rachel as a victim—to suppose that she was in danger of vainly fixing her affections upon Florimond. She was much more likely to triumph than to suffer; and if her visit to Boston were to produce bitter fruits, it would not be she who should taste them. She had a striking, oriental head, a beautiful smile, a manner of dressing which carried out her exotic type, and a great deal of experience and wit. She evidently knew the world, as one knows it when one has to live by its help. If she had an aim in life, she would draw her bow well above the tender breast of Florimond Daintry. With all this, she certainly was an honest, obliging girl, and had a sense of humour which was a fortunate obstacle to her falling into a pose. Her coins and amulets and seamless garments were, for her, a part of the general joke of one's looking like a Circassian or a Smyrniote—an accident for which nature was responsible; and it may be said of her that she took herself much less seriously than other people took her. This was a defect for which Lucretia Daintry had a great kindness; especially as she quickly saw that Rachel was not of an insipid paste, as even triumphant coquettes sometimes are. In spite of her poverty and the opportunities her beauty

must have brought her, she had not yet seen fit to marry—which was a proof that she was clever as well as disinterested. It looks dreadfully cold-blooded as I write it here, but the notion that this capable creature might administer poetic justice to Florimond gave a measurable satisfaction to Miss Daintry. He was in distinct need of a snub, for down in Newbury Street his mother was perpetually swinging the censer; and no young nature could stand that sort of thing—least of all such a nature as Florimond's. She said to herself that such a "putting in his place" as he might receive from Rachel Torrance would probably be a permanent correction. She wished his good, as she wished the good of every one; and that desire was at the bottom of her vision. She knew perfectly what she should like: she should like him to fall in love with Rachel, as he probably would, and to have no doubt of her feeling immensely honoured. She should like Rachel to encourage him just enough—just so far as she might, without being false. A little would do, for Florimond would always take his success for granted. To this point did the study of her nephew's moral regeneration bring the excellent woman who a few days before had accused his mother of a lack of morality. His mother was thinking only of his pleasure; *she* was thinking of his immortal spirit. She should like Rachel to tell him at the end that he was a presumptuous little boy, and that since it was his business to render "impressions," he might see what he could do with that of having been jilted. This extraordinary flight of fancy on Miss Daintry's part was caused in some degree by the high spirits which sprang from her conviction, after she met the young lady, that Mrs. Mesh's companion was not in danger; for even when she wrote to her sister-in-law in the manner the reader knows, her conscience was not wholly at rest. There was still a risk, and she

## A NEW ENGLAND WINTER

knew not why she should take risks for Florimond. Now, however, she was prepared to be perfectly happy when she should hear that the young man was constantly in Arlington Street ; and at the end of a little month she enjoyed this felicity.

## VI

MRS. MESH sat on one side of the fire, and Florimond on the other ; he had by this time acquired the privilege of a customary seat. He had taken a general view of Boston. It was like a first introduction, for before his going to live in Paris he had been too young to judge ; and the result of this survey was the conviction that there was nothing better than Mrs. Mesh's drawing-room. She was one of the few persons whom one was certain to find at home after five o'clock ; and the place itself was agreeable to Florimond, who was very fastidious about furniture and decorations. He was willing to concede that Mrs. Mesh (the relationship had not yet seemed close enough to justify him in calling her Pauline) knew a great deal about such matters ; though it was clear that she was indebted for some of her illumination to Rachel Torrance, who had induced her to make several changes. These two ladies, between them, represented a great fund of taste ; with a difference that was a result of Rachel's knowing clearly beforehand what she liked (Florimond called her, at least, by her baptismal name), and Mrs. Mesh's only knowing it after a succession of experiments, of transposings and drapings, all more or less ingenious and expensive. If Florimond liked Mrs. Mesh's drawing-room better than any other corner of Boston, he also had his preference in regard to its phases and hours. It was most charming in the winter

twilight, by the glow of the fire, before the lamps had been brought in. The ruddy flicker played over many objects, making them look more mysterious than Florimond had supposed anything could look in Boston, and, among others, upon Rachel Torrance, who, when she moved about the room in a desultory way (never so much *enfoncee*, as Florimond said, in a chair as Mrs. Mesh was), certainly attracted and detained the eye. The young man from his corner (he was almost as much *enfonce* as Mrs. Mesh) used to watch her ; and he could easily see what his aunt had meant by saying she had a serpentine figure. She was slim and flexible, she took attitudes which would have been awkward in other women, but which her charming pliancy made natural. She reminded him of a celebrated actress in Paris who was the ideal of tortuous thinness. Miss Torrance used often to seat herself for a short time at the piano ; and though she never had been taught this art (she played only by ear), her musical feeling was such that she charmed the twilight hour. Mrs. Mesh sat on one side of the fire, as I have said, and Florimond on the other ; the two might have been found in this relation—listening, face to face—almost any day in the week. Mrs. Mesh raved about her new friend, as they said in Boston—I mean about Rachel Torrance, not about Florimond Daintry. She had at last got hold of a mind that understood her own (Mrs. Mesh's mind contained depths of mystery), and she sacrificed herself, generally, to throw her companion into relief. Her sacrifice was rewarded, for the girl was universally liked and admired ; she was a new type altogether ; she was the lioness of the winter. Florimond had an opportunity to see his native town in one of its fits of enthusiasm. He had heard of the infatuations of Boston, literary and social ; of its capacity for giving itself with intensity to a temporary



topic ; and he was now conscious, on all sides, of the breath of New England discussion. Some one had said to him—or had said to some one, who repeated it—that there was no place like Boston for taking up with such seriousness a second-rate spinster from Brooklyn. But Florimond himself made no criticism ; for, as we know, he speedily fell under the charm of Rachel Torrance's personality. He was perpetually talking with Mrs. Mesh about it ; and when Mrs. Mesh herself descanted on the subject, he listened with the utmost attention. At first, on his return, he rather feared the want of topics ; he foresaw that he should miss the talk of the studios, of the theatres, of the boulevard, of a little circle of " naturalists " (in literature and art) to which he belonged, without sharing all its views. But he presently perceived that Boston, too, had its actualities, and that it even had this in common with Paris—that it gave its attention most willingly to a female celebrity. If he had had any hope of being himself the lion of the winter, it had been dissipated by the spectacle of his cousin's success. He saw that while she was there he could only be a subject of secondary reference. He bore her no grudge for this. I must hasten to declare that from the pettiness of this particular jealousy poor Florimond was quite exempt. Moreover, he was swept along by the general chorus ; and he perceived that when one changes one's sky, one inevitably changes, more or less, one's standard. Rachel Torrance was neither an actress, nor a singer, nor a beauty, nor one of the ladies who were chronicled in the *Figaro*, nor the author of a successful book, nor a person of the great world ; she had neither a future, nor a past, nor a position, nor even a husband, to make her identity more solid ; she was a simple American girl, of the class that lived in *pensions* (a class of which Florimond had ever entertained a theoretic horror) ; and yet she had

profited to the degree of which our young man was witness, by those treasures of sympathy constantly in reserve in the American public (as has already been intimated) for the youthful-feminine. If Florimond was struck with all this, it may be imagined whether or not his mother thought she had been clever when it occurred to her (before any one else) that Rachel would be a resource for the term of hibernation. She had forgotten all her scruples and hesitations; she only knew she had seen very far. She was proud of her prescience, she was even amused with it; and for the moment she held her head rather high. No one knew of it but Lucretia—for she had never confided it to Joanna, of whom she would have been more afraid in such a connexion even than of her sister-in-law; but Mr. and Mrs. Merriman perceived an unusual lightness in her step, a fitful sparkle in her eye. It was of course easy for them to make up their mind that she was exhilarated to this degree by the presence of her son; especially as he seemed to be getting on beautifully in Boston.

"She stays out longer every day; she is scarcely ever home to tea," Mrs. Mesh remarked, looking up at the clock on the chimney-piece.

Florimond could not fail to know to whom she alluded, for it has been intimated that between these two there was much conversation about Rachel Torrance. "It's funny, the way the girls run about alone here," he said, in the amused, contemplative tone in which he frequently expressed himself on the subject of American life. "Rachel stays out after dark, and no one thinks any the worse of her."

"Oh, well, she's old enough," Mrs. Mesh rejoined, with a little sigh, which seemed to suggest that Rachel's age was really affecting. Her eyes had been opened by Florimond to many of the peculiarities of the society that surrounded her; and though she had

spent only as many months in Europe as her visitor had spent years, she now sometimes spoke as if she thought the manners of Boston more odd even than he could pretend to do. She was very quick at picking up an idea, and there was nothing she desired more than to have the last on every subject. This winter, from her two new friends, Florimond and Rachel, she had extracted a great many that were new to her ; the only trouble was that, coming from different sources, they sometimes contradicted each other. Many of them, however, were very vivifying ; they added a new zest to that prospect of life which had always, in winter, the denuded bushes, the solid pond, the plank-covered walks, the exaggerated bridge, the patriotic statues, the dry, hard texture of the Public Garden for its foreground, and for its middle distance the pale, frozen twigs, stiff in the windy sky that whistled over the Common, the domestic dome of the State House, familiar in the untinted air, and the competitive spires of a liberal faith. Mrs. Mesh had an active imagination, and plenty of time on her hands. Her two children were young, and they slept a good deal ; she had explained to Florimond, who observed that she was a great deal less in the nursery than his sister, that she pretended only to give her attention to their waking hours. " I have people for the rest of the time," she said ; and the rest of the time was considerable ; so that there were very few obstacles to her cultivation of ideas. There was one in her mind now, and I may as well impart it to the reader without delay. She was not quite so delighted with Rachel Torrance as she had been a month ago ; it seemed to her that the young lady took up—socially speaking—too much room in the house ; and she wondered how long she intended to remain, and whether it would be possible, without a direct request, to induce her to take her way back to Brooklyn.

This last was the conception with which she was at present engaged ; she was at moments much pressed by it, and she had thoughts of taking Florimond Daintry into her confidence. This, however, she determined not to do, lest he should regard it as a sign that she was jealous of her companion. I know not whether she was, but this I know—that Mrs. Mesh was a woman of a high ideal and would not for the world have appeared so. If she was jealous, this would imply that she thought Florimond was in love with Rachel ; and she could only object to that on the ground of being in love with him herself. She was not in love with him, and had no intention of being ; of this the reader, possibly alarmed, may definitely rest assured. Moreover, she did not think him in love with Rachel ; as to her reason for this reserve, I need not, perhaps, be absolutely outspoken. She was not jealous, she would have said ; she was only oppressed—she was a little over-ridden. Rachel pervaded her house, pervaded her life, pervaded Boston ; every one thought it necessary to talk to her about Rachel, to rave about her in the Boston manner, which seemed to Mrs. Mesh, in spite of the Puritan tradition, very much more unbridled than that of Baltimore. They thought it would give her pleasure ; but by this time she knew everything about Rachel. The girl had proved rather more of a figure than she expected ; and though she could not be called pretentious, she had the air, in staying with Pauline Mesh, of conferring rather more of a favour than she received. This was absurd for a person who was, after all, though not in her first youth, only a girl, and who, as Mrs. Mesh was sure from her biography—for Rachel had related every item—had never before had such unrestricted access to the fleshpots. The fleshpots were full, under Donald Mesh's roof, and his wife could easily believe that the poor girl would not be in

a hurry to return to her boarding-house in Brooklyn. For that matter there were lots of people in Boston who would be delighted that she should come to them. It was doubtless an inconsistency on Mrs. Mesh's part that if she was overdone with the praises of Rachel Torrance which fell from every lip, she should not herself have forborne to broach the topic. But I have sufficiently intimated that it had a perverse fascination for her ; it is true she did not speak of Rachel only to praise her. Florimond, in truth, was a little weary of the young lady's name ; he had plenty of topics of his own, and he had his own opinion about Rachel Torrance. He did not take up Mrs. Mesh's remark as to her being old enough.

" You must wait till she comes in. Please ring for tea," said Mrs. Mesh, after a pause. She had noticed that Florimond was comparing his watch with her clock ; it occurred to her that he might be going.

" Oh, I always wait, you know ; I like to see her when she has been anywhere. She tells one all about it, and describes everything so well."

Mrs. Mesh looked at him a moment. " She sees a great deal more in things than I am usually able to discover. She sees the most extraordinary things in Boston."

" Well, so do I," said Florimond, placidly.

" Well, I don't, I must say ! " She asked him to ring again ; and then, with a slight irritation, accused him of not ringing hard enough ; but before he could repeat the operation she left her chair and went herself to the bell. After this she stood before the fire a moment, gazing into it ; then suggested to Florimond that he should put on a log.

" Is it necessary—when your servant is coming in a moment ? " the young man asked, unexpectedly, without moving. In an instant, however, he rose ; and then he explained that this was only his little joke.

"Servants are too stupid," said Mrs. Mesh. "But I spoil you. What would your mother say?" She watched him while he placed the log. She was plump, and she was not tall; but she was a very pretty woman. She had round brown eyes, which looked as if she had been crying a little—she had nothing in life to cry about; and dark, wavy hair, which here and there, in short, crisp tendrils, escaped artfully from the form in which it was dressed. When she smiled, she showed very pretty teeth; and the combination of her touching eyes and her parted lips was at such moments almost bewitching. She was accustomed to express herself in humorous superlatives, in pictorial circumlocutions; and had acquired in Boston the rudiments of a social dialect which, to be heard in perfection, should be heard on the lips of a native. Mrs. Mesh had picked it up; but it must be confessed that she used it without originality. It was an accident that on this occasion she had not expressed her wish for her tea by saying that she should like a pint or two of that Chinese fluid.

"My mother believes I can't be spoiled," said Florimond, giving a little push with his toe to the stick that he had placed in the embers; after which he sank back into his chair, while Mrs. Mesh resumed possession of her own. "I am ever fresh—ever pure."

"You are ever conceited. I don't see what you find so extraordinary in Boston," Mrs. Mesh added, reverting to his remark of a moment before.

"Oh, everything! the ways of the people, their ideas, their peculiar *cachet*. The very expression of their faces amuses me."

"Most of them have no expression at all."

"Oh, you are used to it," Florimond said. "You have become one of themselves; you have ceased to notice."

"I am more of a stranger than you; I was born



beneath other skies. Is it possible that you don't know yet that I am a native of Baltimore? 'Maryland, my Maryland!' "

"Have they got so much expression in Maryland? No, I thank you; no tea. Is it possible," Florimond went on, with the familiarity of pretended irritation, "is it possible that you haven't noticed yet that I never take it? *Boisson fade, écœurante*, as Balzac calls it."

"Ah, well, if you don't take it on account of Balzac!" said Mrs. Mesh. "I never saw a man who had such fantastic reasons. Where, by the way, is the volume of that depraved old author you promised to bring me?"

"When do you think he flourished? You call everything old, in this country, that isn't in the morning paper. I haven't brought you the volume, because I don't want to bring you presents," Florimond said; "I want you to love me for myself, as they say in Paris."

"Don't quote what they say in Paris! Don't profane this innocent bower with those fearful words!" Mrs. Mesh rejoined, with a jocose intention. "Dear lady, your son is not everything we could wish!" she added in the same mock-dramatic tone, as the curtain of the door was lifted, and Mrs. Daintry rather timidly advanced. Mrs. Daintry had come to satisfy a curiosity, after all quite legitimate; she could no longer resist the impulse to ascertain for herself, so far as she might, how Rachel Torrance and Florimond were getting on. She had had no definite expectation of finding Florimond at Mrs. Mesh's; but she supposed that at this hour of the afternoon—it was already dark, and the ice, in many parts of Beacon Street, had a polish which gleamed through the dusk—she should find Rachel. "Your son has lived too long in far-off lands; he has dwelt among outworn things," Mrs. Mesh went on, as



she conducted her visitor to a chair. "Dear lady, you are not as Balzac was ; do you start at the mention of his name ?—therefore you will have some tea in a little painted cup."

Mrs. Daintry was not bewildered, though it may occur to the reader that she might have been ; she was only a little disappointed. She had hoped she might have occasion to talk about Florimond ; but the young man's presence was a denial of this privilege. "I am afraid Rachel is not at home," she remarked. "I am afraid she will think I have not been very attentive."

"She will be in in a moment ; we are waiting for her," Florimond said. "It's impossible she should think any harm of you. I have told her too much good."

"Ah, Mrs. Daintry, don't build too much on what he has told her ! He's a false and faithless man !" Pauline Mesh interposed ; while the good lady from Newbury Street, smiling at this adjuration, but looking a little grave, turned from one of her companions to the other. Florimond had relapsed into his chair by the fireplace ; he sat contemplating the embers, and fingering the tip of his moustache. Mrs. Daintry imbibed her tea, and told how often she had slipped coming down the hill. These expedients helped her to wear a quiet face ; but in reality she was nervous, and she felt rather foolish. It came over her that she was rather dishonest ; she had presented herself at Mrs. Mesh's in the capacity of a spy. The reader already knows she was subject to sudden revulsions of feeling. There is an adage about repenting at leisure ; but Mrs. Daintry always repented in a hurry. There was something in the air—something impalpable, magnetic—that told her she had better not have come ; and even while she conversed with Mrs. Mesh she wondered what this mystic element could

be. Of course she had been greatly preoccupied, these last weeks ; for it had seemed to her that her plan with regard to Rachel Torrance was succeeding only too well. Florimond had frankly accepted her in the spirit in which she had been offered, and it was very plain that she was helping him to pass his winter. He was constantly at the house—Mrs. Daintry could not tell exactly how often ; but she knew very well that in Boston, if one saw anything of a person, one saw a good deal. At first he used to speak of it ; for two or three weeks he had talked a good deal about Rachel Torrance. More lately, his allusions had become few ; yet to the best of Mrs. Daintry's belief his step was often in Arlington Street. This aroused her suspicions, and at times it troubled her conscience ; there were moments when she wondered whether, in arranging a genial winter for Florimond, she had also prepared a season of torment for herself. Was he in love with the girl, or had he already discovered that the girl was in love with him ? The delicacy of either situation would account for his silence. Mrs. Daintry said to herself that it would be a grim joke if she should prove to have plotted only too well. It was her sister-in-law's warning in especial that haunted her imagination, and she scarcely knew, at times, whether more to hope that Florimond might have been smitten, or to pray that Rachel might remain indifferent. It was impossible for Mrs. Daintry to shake off the sense of responsibility ; she could not shut her eyes to the fact that she had been the prime mover. It was all very well to say that the situation, as it stood, was of Lucretia's making ; the thing never would have come into Lucretia's head if she had not laid it before her. Unfortunately, with the quiet life she led, she had very little chance to observe ; she went out so little, that she was reduced to guessing what the manner of the two young persons might be to

each other when they met in society, and she should have thought herself wanting in delicacy if she had sought to be intimate with Rachel Torrance. Now that her plan was in operation, she could make no attempt to foster it, to acknowledge it in the face of Heaven. Fortunately, Rachel had so many attentions, that there was no fear of her missing those of Newbury Street. She had dined there once, in the first days of her sojourn, without Pauline and Donald, who had declined, and with Joanna and Joanna's husband for all "company." Mrs. Daintry had noticed nothing particular then, save that Arthur Merriman talked rather more than usual—though he was always a free talker—and had bantered Rachel rather more familiarly than was perhaps necessary (considering that *he*, after all, was not her cousin) on her ignorance of Boston, and her thinking that Pauline Mesh could tell her anything about it. On this occasion Florimond talked very little; of course he could not say much when Arthur was in such extraordinary spirits. She knew by this time all that Florimond thought of his brother-in-law, and she herself had to confess that she liked Arthur better in his jaded hours, even though then he was a little cynical. Mrs. Daintry had been perhaps a little disappointed in Rachel, whom she saw for the first time in several years. The girl was less peculiar than she remembered her being, savoured less of the old studio, the musical parties, the creditors waiting at the door. However, people in Boston found her unusual, and Mrs. Daintry reflected, with a twinge at her depravity, that perhaps she had expected something too dishevelled. At any rate, several weeks had elapsed since then, and there had been plenty of time for Miss Torrance to attach herself to Florimond. It was less than ever Mrs. Daintry's wish that he should (even in this case) ask her to be his wife. It seemed to her

less than ever the way her son should marry—because he had got entangled with a girl in consequence of his mother's rashness. It occurred to her, of course, that she might warn the young man ; but when it came to the point she could not bring herself to speak. She had never discussed the question of love with him, and she didn't know what ideas he might have brought with him from Paris. It was too delicate ; it might put notions into his head. He might say something strange and French, which she shouldn't like ; and then perhaps she should feel bound to warn Rachel herself—a complication from which she absolutely shrank. It was part of her embarrassment now, as she sat in Mrs. Mesh's drawing-room, that she should probably spoil Florimond's entertainment for this afternoon, and that such a crossing of his inclination would make him the more dangerous. He had told her that he was waiting for Rachel to come in ; and at the same time, in view of the lateness of the hour and her being on foot, when she herself should take her leave he would be bound in decency to accompany her. As for remaining after Rachel should come in, that was an indiscretion which scarcely seemed to her possible. Mrs. Daintry was an American mother, and she knew what the elder generation owes to the younger. If Florimond had come there to call on a young lady, he didn't, as they used to say, want any mothers round. She glanced covertly at her son, to try and find some comfort in his countenance ; for her perplexity was heavy. But she was struck only with his looking very handsome, as he lounged there in the firelight, and with his being very much at home. This did not lighten her burden, and she expressed all the weight of it—in the midst of Mrs. Mesh's flights of comparison—in an irrelevant little sigh. At such a time her only comfort could be the thought that at all events she had not betrayed herself to Lucretia.

She had scarcely exchanged a word with Lucretia about Rachel since that young lady's arrival ; and she had observed in silence that Miss Daintry now had a guest in the person of a young woman who had lately opened a kindergarten. This reticence might surely pass for natural.

Rachel came in before long, but even then Mrs. Daintry ventured to stay a little. The visitor from Brooklyn embraced Mrs. Mesh, who told her that, prodigal as she was, there was no fatted calf for her return ; she must content herself with cold tea. Nothing could be more charming than her manner, which was full of native archness ; and it seemed to Mrs. Daintry that she directed her pleasantries at Florimond with a grace that was intended to be irresistible. The relation between them was a relation of " chaff," and consisted, on one side and the other, in alternations of attack and defence. Mrs. Daintry reflected that she should not wish her son to have a wife who should be perpetually turning him into a joke ; for it seemed to her, perhaps, that Rachel Torrance put in her thrusts rather faster than Florimond could parry them. She was evidently rather wanting in the faculty of reverence, and Florimond panted a little. They presently went into an adjoining room, where the lamplight was brighter ; Rachel wished to show the young man an old painted fan, which she had brought back from the repairer's. They remained there ten minutes. Mrs. Daintry, as she sat with Mrs. Mesh, heard their voices much intermingled. She wished very much to confide herself a little to Pauline—to ask her whether she thought Rachel was in love with Florimond. But she had a foreboding that this would not be safe ; Pauline was capable of repeating her question to the others, of calling out to Rachel to come back and answer it. She contented herself, therefore, with asking her

hostess about the little Meshes, and regaling her with anecdotes of Joanna's progeny.

"Don't you ever have your little ones with you at this hour?" she inquired. "You know this is what Longfellow calls the children's hour."

Mrs. Mesh hesitated a moment. "Well, you know, one can't have everything at once. I have my social duties now; I have my guests. I have Miss Torrance—you see she is not a person one can overlook."

"I suppose not," said poor Mrs. Daintry, remembering how little she herself had overlooked her.

"Have you done brandishing that superannuated relic?" Mrs. Mesh asked of Rachel and Florimond, as they returned to the fireside. "I should as soon think of fanning myself with the fire-shovel!"

"He has broken my heart," Rachel said. "He tells me it is not a Watteau."

"Do you believe everything he tells you, my dear? His word is the word of the betrayer."

"Well, I know Watteau didn't paint fans," Florimond remarked, "any more than Michael Angelo."

"I suppose you think he painted ceilings," said Rachel Torrance. "I have painted a great many myself."

"A great many ceilings? I should like to see that!" Florimond exclaimed.

Rachel Torrance, with her usual promptness, adopted this fantasy. "Yes, I have decorated half the churches in Brooklyn; you know how many there are."

"If you mean fans, I wish men carried them," the young man went on; "I should like to have one *de votre façon*."

"You're cool enough as you are; I should be sorry to give you anything that would make you cooler!"

This retort, which may not strike the reader by its originality, was pregnant enough for Mrs. Daintry; it



seemed to her to denote that the situation was critical ; and she proposed to retire. Florimond walked home with her ; but it was only as they reached their door that she ventured to say to him what had been on her tongue's end since they left Arlington Street.

" Florimond, I want to ask you something. I think it is important, and you mustn't be surprised. Are you in love with Rachel Torrance ? "

Florimond stared, in the light of the street-lamp. The collar of his overcoat was turned up ; he stamped a little as he stood still ; the breath of the February evening pervaded the empty vistas of the " new land." " In love with Rachel Torrance ? *Jamais de la vie !* What put that into your head ? "

" Seeing you with her, that way, this evening. You know you are very attentive."

" How do you mean, attentive ? "

" You go there very often. Isn't it almost every day ? "

Florimond hesitated, and, in spite of the frigid dusk, his mother could see that there was irritation in his eye. " Where else can I go, in this precious place ? It's the pleasantest house here."

" Yes, I suppose it's very pleasant," Mrs. Daintry murmured. " But I would rather have you return to Paris than go there too often," she added, with sudden energy.

" How do you mean, too often ? *Qu'est-ce qui vous prend, ma mère ?* " said Florimond.

" Is Rachel—Rachel in love with *you* ? " she inquired solemnly. She felt that this question, though her heart beat as she uttered it, should not be mitigated by a circumlocution.

" Good heavens ! mother, fancy talking about love in this temperature ! " Florimond exclaimed. " Let one at least get into the house."

Mrs. Daintry followed him reluctantly ; for she



always had a feeling that if anything disagreeable were to be done one should not make it less drastic by selecting agreeable conditions. In the drawing-room, before the fire, she returned to her inquiry.

"My son, you have not answered me about Rachel."

"Is she in love with me? Why, very possibly!"

"Are you serious, Florimond?"

"Why shouldn't I be? I have seen the way women go off."

Mrs. Daintry was silent a moment. "Florimond, is it true?" she said presently.

"Is what true? I don't see where you want to come out."

"Is it true that that girl has fixed her affections——" and Mrs. Daintry's voice dropped.

"Upon me, *ma mère*? I don't say it's true, but I say it's possible. You ask me, and I can only answer you. I am not swaggering, I am simply giving you decent satisfaction. You wouldn't have me think it impossible that a woman should fall in love with me? You know what women are, and now there is nothing, in that way, too queer for them to do."

Mrs. Daintry, in spite of the knowledge of her sex that she might be supposed to possess, was not prepared to rank herself on the side of this axiom. "I wished to warn you," she simply said; "do be very careful."

"Yes, I'll be careful; but I can't give up the house."

"There are other houses, Florimond."

"Yes, but there is a special charm there."

"I would rather you should return to Paris than do any harm."

"Oh, I shan't do any harm; don't worry, *ma mère*," said Florimond.

It was a relief to Mrs. Daintry to have spoken,

## A NEW ENGLAND WINTER

and she endeavoured not to worry. It was doubtless this effort that, for the rest of the winter, gave her a somewhat rigid, anxious look. People who met her in Beacon Street missed something from her face. It was her usual confidence in the clearness of human duty ; and some of her friends explained the change by saying that she was disappointed about Florimond—she was afraid he was not particularly liked.

## VII

By the first of March this young man had received a good many optical impressions, and had noted in water-colours several characteristic winter effects. He had perambulated Boston in every direction, he had even extended his researches to the suburbs ; and if his eye had been curious, his eye was now almost satisfied. He perceived that even amid the simple civilisation of New England there was material for the naturalist ; and in Washington Street, of a winter's afternoon, it came home to him that it was a fortunate thing the impressionist was not exclusively pre-occupied with the beautiful. He became familiar with the slushy streets, crowded with thronging pedestrians and obstructed horse-cars, bordered with strange, promiscuous shops, which seemed at once violent and indifferent, overhung with snowbanks from the house tops ; the avalanche that detached itself at intervals fell with an enormous thud amid the dense processions of women, made for a moment a clear space, splashed with whiter snow, on the pavement, and contributed to the gaiety of the Puritan capital. Supreme in the thoroughfare was the rigid groove of the railway, where oblong receptacles, of fabulous capacity, governed by familiar citizens, jolted and jingled eternally, close on each other's rear, absorbing and emitting innumerable specimens of a single type. The road on either side, buried in mounds of pulverised, mud-coloured ice, was

ploughed across by labouring vehicles, and traversed periodically by the sisterhood of "shoppers," laden with satchels and parcels, and protected by a round-backed policeman. Florimond looked at the shops, saw the women disgorge, surging, ebbing, dodged the avalanches, squeezed in and out of the horse-cars, made himself, on their little platforms, where flatness was enforced, as perpendicular as possible. The horses steamed in the sunny air, the conductor punched the tickets and poked the passengers, some of whom were under and some above, and all alike stabled in trampled straw. They were precipitated, collectively, by stoppages and starts; the tight, silent interior stuffed itself more and more, and the whole machine heaved and reeled in its interrupted course. Florimond had forgotten the look of many things, the details of American publicity; in some cases, indeed, he only pretended to himself that he had forgotten them, because it helped to entertain him. The houses—a bristling, jagged line of talls and shorts, a parti-coloured surface, expressively commercial—were spotted with staring signs, with labels and pictures, with advertisements familiar, colloquial, vulgar; the air was traversed with the tangle of the telegraph, with festoons of bunting, with banners not of war, with inexplicable loops and ropes; the shops, many of them enormous, had heterogeneous fronts, with queer juxtapositions in the articles that peopled them, an incompleteness of array, the stamp of the latest modern ugliness. They had pendant stuffs in the doorways, and flapping tickets outside. Every fifty yards there was a "candy store"; in the intervals was the painted panel of a chiropodist, representing him in his professional attitude. Behind the plates of glass, in the hot interiors, behind the counters, were pale, familiar, delicate, tired faces of women, with polished hair and glazed complexions. Florimond knew their voices; he

knew how women would speak when their hair was "treated," as they said in the studios, like that. But the women that passed through the streets were the main spectacle. Florimond had forgotten their extraordinary numerosity, and the impression that they produced of a deluge of petticoats. He could see that they were perfectly at home on the road; they had an air of possession, of perpetual equipment, a look, in the eyes, of always meeting the gaze of crowds, always seeing people pass, noting things in shop windows, and being on the watch at crossings; many of them evidently passed most of their time in these conditions, and Florimond wondered what sort of *intérieurs* they could have. He felt at moments that he was in a city of women, in a country of women. The same impression came to him *dans le monde*, as he used to say, for he made the most incongruous application of his little French phrases to Boston. The talk, the social life, were so completely in the hands of the ladies, the masculine note was so subordinate, that on certain occasions he could have believed himself (putting the brightness aside) in a country stricken by a war, where the men had all gone to the army, or in a seaport half depopulated by the absence of its vessels. This idea had intermissions; for instance, when he walked out to Cambridge. In this little excursion he often indulged; he used to go and see one of his college mates, who was now a tutor at Harvard. He stretched away across the long, mean bridge that spans the mouth of the Charles—a mile of wooden piles, supporting a brick pavement, a roadway deep in mire, and a rough timber fence, over which the pedestrian enjoys a view of the frozen bay, the backs of many new houses, and a big brown marsh. The horse-cars bore him company, relieved here of the press of the streets, though not of their internal congestion, and constituting the principal feature of the wide, blank avenue,

where the puddles lay large across the bounding rails. He followed their direction through a middle region, in which the small wooden houses had an air of tent-like impermanence, and the February mornings, splendid and indiscreet, stared into bare windows and seemed to make civilisation transparent. Further, the suburb remained wooden, but grew neat, and the painted houses looked out on the car-track with an expression almost of superiority. At Harvard, the buildings were square and fresh ; they stood in a yard planted with slender elms, which the winter had reduced to spindles ; the town stretched away from the horizontal palings of the collegiate precinct, low, flat, and immense, with vague, featureless spaces and the air of a clean encampment. Florimond remembered that when the summer came in, the whole place was transformed. It was pervaded by verdure and dust, the slender elms became profuse, arching over the unpaved streets, the green shutters bowed themselves before the windows, the flowers and creeping-plants bloomed in the small gardens, and on the piazzas, in the gaps of dropped awnings, light dresses arrested the eye. At night, in the warm darkness—for Cambridge is not festooned with lamps—the bosom of nature would seem to palpitate, there would be a smell of earth and vegetation—a smell more primitive than the odour of Europe—and the air would vibrate with the sound of insects. All this was in reserve, if one would have patience, especially from March to June ; but for the present the seat of the University struck our poor little critical Florimond as rather hard and bare. As the winter went on, and the days grew longer, he knew that Mrs. Daintry often believed him to be in Arlington Street when he was walking out to see his friend the tutor, who had once spent a winter in Paris and never tired of talking about it. It is to be feared that he did not undeceive her so punctually as he might ;

for, in the first place, he was at Mrs. Mesh's very often ; in the second, he failed to understand how worried his mother was ; and in the third, the idea that he should be thought to have the peace of mind of a brilliant girl in his keeping was not disagreeable to him.

One day his Aunt Lucretia found him in Arlington Street ; it occurred to her about the middle of the winter that, considering she liked Rachel Torrance so much, she had not been to see her very often. She had little time for such indulgences ; but she caught a moment in its flight, and was told at Mrs. Mesh's door that this lady had not yet come in, but that her companion was accessible. Florimond was in his customary chair by the chimney-corner (his aunt perhaps did not know quite how customary it was), and Rachel, at the piano, was regaling him with a composition of Schubert. Florimond, up to this time, had not become very intimate with his aunt, who had not, as it were, given him the key of her house, and in whom he detected a certain want of interest in his affairs. He had a limited sympathy with people who were interested only in their own, and perceived that Miss Daintry belonged to this preoccupied and ungraceful class. It seemed to him that it would have been more becoming in her to feign at least a certain attention to the professional and social prospects of the most promising of her nephews. If there was one thing that Florimond disliked more than another, it was an eager self-absorption ; and he could not see that it was any better for people to impose their personality upon committees and charities than upon general society. He would have modified this judgment of his kinswoman, with whom he had dined but once, if he could have guessed with what anxiety she watched for the symptoms of that salutary change which she expected to see wrought in him by the



fascinating independence of Rachel Torrance. If she had dared, she would have prompted the girl a little ; she would have confided to her this secret desire. But the matter was delicate ; and Miss Daintry was shrewd enough to see that everything must be spontaneous. When she paused at the threshold of Mrs. Mesh's drawing-room, looking from one of her young companions to the other, she felt a slight pang, for she feared they were getting on too well. Rachel was pouring sweet music into the young man's ears, and turning to look at him over her shoulder while she played ; and he, with his head tipped back and his eyes on the ceiling, hummed an accompaniment which occasionally became an articulate remark. Harmonious intimacy was stamped upon the scene, and poor Miss Daintry was not struck with its being in any degree salutary. She was not reassured when, after ten minutes, Florimond took his departure ; she could see that he was irritated by the presence of a third person ; and this was a proof that Rachel had not yet begun to do her duty by him. It is possible that when the two ladies were left together, her disappointment would have led her to betray her views, had not Rachel almost immediately said to her : " My dear cousin, I am so glad you have come ; I might not have seen you again. I go away in three days."

" Go away ? Where do you go to ? "

" Back to Brooklyn," said Rachel, smiling sweetly.

" Why on earth—I thought you had come here to stay for six months ? "

" Oh, you know, six months would be a terrible visit for these good people ; and of course no time was fixed. That would have been very absurd. I have been here an immense time already. It was to be as things should go."

" And haven't they gone well ? "

"Oh yes, they have gone beautifully."

"Then why in the world do you leave?"

"Well, you know, I have duties at home. My mother coughs a good deal, and they write me dismal letters."

"They are ridiculous, selfish people. You are going home because your mother coughs? I don't believe a word of it!" Miss Daintry cried. "You have some other reason. Something has happened here; it has become disagreeable. Be so good as to tell me the whole story."

Rachel answered that there was not any story to tell, and that her reason consisted entirely of conscientious scruples as to absenting herself so long from her domestic circle. Miss Daintry esteemed conscientious scruples when they were well placed, but she thought poorly on the present occasion of those of Mrs. Mesh's visitor; they interfered so much with her own sense of fitness. "Has Florimond been making love to you?" she suddenly inquired. "You mustn't mind that—beyond boxing his ears."

Her question appeared to amuse Miss Torrance exceedingly; and the girl, a little inarticulate with her mirth, answered very positively that the young man had done her no such honour.

"I am very sorry to hear it," said Lucretia; "I was in hopes he would give you a chance to take him down. He needs it very much. He's dreadfully puffed up."

"He's an amusing little man!"

Miss Daintry put on her nippers. "Don't tell me it's you that are in love!"

"Oh dear, no! I like big, serious men; not small Frenchified gentlemen, like Florimond. Excuse me if he's your nephew, but you began it. Though I am fond of art," the girl added, "I don't think I am fond of artists."

“ Do you call Florimond an artist ? ”

Rachel Torrance hesitated a little, smiling. “ Yes, when he poses for Pauline Mesh.”

This rejoinder for a moment left Miss Daintry in visible perplexity ; then a sudden light seemed to come to her. She flushed a little ; what she found was more than she was looking for. She thought of many things quickly, and among others she thought that she had accomplished rather more than she intended. “ Have you quarrelled with Pauline ? ” she said presently.

“ No, but she is tired of me.”

“ Everything has not gone well, then, and you *have* another reason for going home than your mother's cough ? ”

“ Yes, if you must know, Pauline wants me to go. I didn't feel free to tell you that ; but since you guess it—— ” said Rachel, with her rancourless smile.

“ Has she asked you to decamp ? ”

“ Oh dear, no ! for what do you take us ? But she absents herself from the house ; she stays away all day. I have to play to Florimond to console him.”

“ So you *have* been fighting about him ? ” Miss Daintry remarked, perversely.

“ Ah, my dear cousin, what have you got in your head ? Fighting about sixpence ! if you knew how Florimond bores me ! I play to him to keep him silent. I have heard everything he has to say, fifty times over ! ”

Miss Daintry sank back in her chair ; she was completely out of her reckoning. “ I think he might have made love to you a little ! ” she exclaimed, incoherently.

“ So do I ! but he didn't—not a crumb. He is afraid of me—thank heaven ! ”

“ It isn't for you he comes, then ? ” Miss Daintry appeared to cling to her theory.

"No, my dear cousin, it isn't!"

"Just now, as he sat there, one could easily have supposed it. He didn't at all like my interruption."

"That was because he was waiting for Pauline to come in. He will wait that way an hour. You may imagine whether he likes me for boring her so that, as I tell you, she can't stay in the house. I am out myself as much as possible. But there are days when I drop with fatigue; then I must rest. I can assure you that it's fortunate that I go so soon."

"Is Pauline in love with him?" Miss Daintry asked, gravely.

"Not a grain. She is the best little woman in the world."

"Except for being a goose. Why, then, does she object to your company—after being so enchanted with you?"

"Because even the best little woman in the world must object to something. She has everything in life, and nothing to complain of. Her children sleep all day, and her cook is a jewel. Her husband adores her, and she is perfectly satisfied with Mr. Mesh. I act on her nerves, and I think she believes I regard her as rather silly to care so much for Florimond. Excuse me again!"

"You contradict yourself. She *does* care for him, then?"

"Oh, as she would care for a new *coupé*! She likes to have a young man of her own—fresh from Paris—quite to herself. She has everything else—why shouldn't she have that? She thinks your nephew very original, and he thinks her what she is—the prettiest woman in Boston. They have an idea that they are making a 'celebrated friendship'—like Horace Walpole and Madame du Deffand. They sit there face to face—they are as innocent as the shovel

and tongs. But, all the same, I am in the way, and Pauline is provoked that I am not jealous."

Miss Daintry got up with energy. "She's a vain, hollow, silly little creature, and you are quite right to go away; you are worthy of better company. Only you will not go back to Brooklyn, in spite of your mother's cough; you will come straight to Mount Vernon Place."

Rachel hesitated to agree to this. She appeared to think it was her duty to quit Boston altogether; and she gave as a reason that she had already refused other invitations. But Miss Daintry had a better reason than this—a reason that glowed in her indignant breast. It was she who had been the cause of the girl's being drawn into this sorry adventure; it was she who should charge herself with the reparation. The conversation I have related took place on a Tuesday; and it was settled that on the Friday Miss Torrance should take up her abode for the rest of the winter under her Cousin Lucretia's roof. This lady left the house without having seen Mrs. Mesh.

On Thursday she had a visit from her sister-in-law, the motive of which was not long in appearing. All winter Mrs. Daintry had managed to keep silent on the subject of her doubts and fears. Discretion and dignity recommended this course; and the topic was a painful one to discuss with Lucretia, for the bruises of their primary interview still occasionally throbbed. But at the first sign of alleviation the excellent woman overflowed, and she lost no time in announcing to Lucretia, as a heaven-sent piece of news, that Rachel had been called away by the illness of poor Mrs. Torrance and was to leave Boston from one day to the other. Florimond had given her this information the evening before, and it had made her so happy that she couldn't help coming to let Lucretia know that they were safe. Lucretia listened to her announcement in

silence, fixing her eyes on her sister-in-law with an expression that the latter thought singular ; but when Mrs. Daintry, expanding still further, went on to say that she had spent a winter of misery, that the harm the two together (she and Lucretia) might have done was never out of her mind, for Florimond's assiduity in Arlington Street had become notorious, and she had been told that the most cruel things were said—when Mrs. Daintry, expressing herself to this effect, added that from the present moment she breathed, the danger was over, the sky was clear, and her conscience might take a holiday—her hostess broke into the most prolonged, the most characteristic and most bewildering fit of laughter in which she had ever known her to indulge. They were safe, Mrs. Daintry had said ? For Lucretia this was true, now, of herself, at least ; she was secure from the dangers of her irritation ; her sense of the whole affair had turned to hilarious music. The contrast that rose before her between her visitor's anxieties and the real position of the parties, her quick vision of poor Susan's dismay in case *that* reality should meet her eyes, among the fragments of her squandered scruples—these things smote the chords of mirth in Miss Daintry's spirit, and seemed to her in their high comicality to offer a sufficient reason for everything that had happened. The picture of her sister-in-law sitting all winter with her hands clasped and her eyes fixed on the wrong object was an image that would abide with her always ; and it would render her an inestimable service—it would cure her of the tendency to worry. As may be imagined, it was eminently open to Mrs. Daintry to ask her what on earth she was laughing at ; and there was a colour in the cheek of Florimond's mother that brought her back to propriety. She suddenly kissed this lady very tenderly—to the latter's great surprise, there having been no kissing since her visit in November—and told her



that she would reveal to her some day, later, the cause of so much merriment. She added that Miss Torrance was leaving Arlington Street, yes ; but only to go as far as Mount Vernon Place. She was engaged to spend three months in that very house. Mrs. Daintry's countenance at this fell several inches, and her joy appeared completely to desert her. She gave her sister-in-law a glance of ineffable reproach, and in a moment she exclaimed : " Then nothing is gained ! it will all go on here ! "

" Nothing will go on here. If you mean that Florimond will pursue the young lady into this mountain fastness, you may simply be quiet. He is not fond enough of me to wear out my threshold."

" Are you very sure ? " Mrs. Daintry murmured, dubiously.

" I know what I say. Hasn't he told you he hates me ? "

Mrs. Daintry coloured again, and hesitated. " I don't know how you think we talk," she said.

" Well, he does, and he will leave us alone."

Mrs. Daintry sprang up with an elasticity that was comical. " That's all I ask ! " she exclaimed.

" I believe you hate me too ! " Lucretia said, laughing ; but at any risk she kissed her sister-in-law again before they separated.

Three weeks later Mrs. Daintry paid her another visit ; and this time she looked very serious. " It's very strange. I don't know what to think. But perhaps you know it already ? " This was her *entrée en matière*, as the French say. " Rachel's leaving Arlington Street has made no difference. He goes there as much as ever. I see no change at all. Lucretia, I have not the peace that I thought had come," said poor Mrs. Daintry, whose voice had failed, below her breath.

" Do you mean that he goes to see Pauline Mesh ? "



" I am afraid so, every day."

" Well, my dear, what's the harm ? " Miss Daintry asked. " He can't hurt *her* by not marrying her."

Mrs. Daintry stared ; she was amazed at her sister-in-law's tone. " But it makes one suppose that all winter, for so many weeks, it has been for *her* that he has gone ! " And the image of the *tête-à-tête* in which she had found them immersed that day rose again before her ; she could interpret it now.

" You wanted some one ; why may not Pauline have served ? "

Mrs. Daintry was silent, with the same expanded eyes. " Lucretia, it is not right ! "

" My dear Susan, you are touching," Lucretia said.

Mrs. Daintry went on, without heeding her. " It appears that people are talking about it ; they have noticed it for ever so long. Joanna never hears anything, or she would have told me. The children are too much. I have been the last to know."

" I knew it a month ago," said Miss Daintry, smiling.

" And you never told me ? "

" I knew that you wanted to detain him. Pauline will detain him a year."

Mrs. Daintry gathered herself together. " Not a day, not an hour, that I can help ! He shall go, if I have to take him."

" My dear Susan," murmured her sister-in-law on the threshold. Miss Daintry scarcely knew what to say ; she was almost frightened at the rigidity of her face.

" My dear Lucretia, it is not right ! " This ejaculation she solemnly repeated, and she took her departure as if she were decided upon action.

She had found so little sympathy in her sister-in-

law that she made no answer to a note Miss Daintry wrote her that evening, to remark that she was really unjust to Pauline, who was silly, vain, and flattered by the development of her ability to monopolise an impressionist, but a perfectly innocent little woman and incapable of a serious flirtation. Miss Daintry had been careful to add to these last words no comment that could possibly shock Florimond's mother. Mrs. Daintry announced, about the 10th of April, that she had made up her mind she needed a change, and had determined to go abroad for the summer; and she looked so tired that people could see there was reason in it. Her summer began early; she embarked on the 20th of the month, accompanied by Florimond. Miss Daintry, who had not been obliged to dismiss the young lady of the kindergarten to make room for Rachel Torrance, never knew what had passed between the mother and the son, and she was disappointed at Mrs. Mesh's coolness in the face of this catastrophe. She disapproved of her flirtation with Florimond, and yet she was vexed at Pauline's pert resignation; it proved her to be so superficial. She disposed of everything with her absurd little phrases, which were half slang and half quotation. Mrs. Daintry was a native of Salem, and this gave Pauline, as a Baltimorean and a descendant of the Cavaliers, an obvious opportunity. Rachel repeated her words to Miss Daintry, for she had spoken to Rachel of Florimond's departure, the day after he embarked. "Oh yes, he's in the midst of the foam, the cruel, crawling foam! I 'kind of' miss him, afternoons; he was so useful round the fire. It's his mother that charmed him away; she's a most uncanny old party. I don't care for Salem witches, anyway; she has worked on him with philters and spells!" Lucretia was obliged to recognise a grain of truth in this last assertion; she felt that her sister-in-law must indeed have worked

## A NEW ENGLAND WINTER

upon Florimond, and she smiled to think that the conscientious Susan should have descended, in the last resort, to an artifice, to a pretext. She had probably persuaded him she was out of patience with Joanna's children.



THE PATH OF DUTY



I AM glad I said to you the other night at Doubleton, inquiring—too inquiring—compatriot, that I wouldn't undertake to tell you the story (about Ambrose Tester), but would write it out for you ; inasmuch as, thinking it over since I came back to town, I see that it may really be made interesting. It is a story, with a regular development, and for telling it I have the advantage that I happened to know about it from the first, and was more or less in the confidence of every one concerned. Then it will amuse me to write it, and I shall do so as carefully and as cleverly as possible. The first winter days in London are not madly gay, so that I have plenty of time, and if the fog is brown outside, the fire is red within. I like the quiet of this season ; the glowing chimney-corner, in the midst of the December mirk, makes me think, as I sit by it, of all sorts of things. The idea that is almost always uppermost is the bigness and strangeness of this London world. Long as I have lived here—the sixteenth anniversary of my marriage is only ten days off—there is still a kind of novelty and excitement in it. It is a great pull, as they say here, to have remained sensitive—to have kept one's own point of view. I mean it's more entertaining—it makes you see a thousand things (not that they are all very charming). But the pleasure of observation does not in the least depend on the beauty of what one observes. You see innumerable little dramas ; in fact almost everything has acts and



scenes, like a comedy. Very often it is a comedy with tears. There have been a good many of them, I am afraid, in the case I am speaking of. It is because this history of Sir Ambrose Tester and Lady Vandeleur struck me, when you asked me about the relations of the parties, as having that kind of progression, that when I was on the point of responding I checked myself, thinking it a pity to tell you a little when I might tell you all. I scarcely know what made you ask, inasmuch as I had said nothing to excite your curiosity. Whatever you suspected you suspected on your own hook, as they say. You had simply noticed the pair together that evening at Doubleton. If you suspected anything in particular, it is a proof that you are rather sharp, because they are very careful about the way they behave in public. At least they think they are; the result, perhaps, doesn't necessarily follow. If I have been in their confidence you may say that I make a strange use of my privilege in serving them up to feed the prejudices of an opinionated American. You think English society very wicked, and my little story will probably not correct the impression. Though, after all, I don't see why it should minister to it; for what I said to you (it was all I did say) remains the truth. They are treading together the path of duty. You would be quite right about its being base in me to betray them. It is very true that they have ceased to confide in me; even Joscelind has said nothing to me for more than a year. That is doubtless a sign that the situation is more serious than before, all round—too serious to be talked about. It is also true that you are remarkably discreet, and that even if you were not it would not make much difference, inasmuch as if you were to repeat my revelations in America no one would know whom you were talking about. But, all the same, I should be base; and,

## THE PATH OF DUTY

therefore, after I have written out my reminiscences for your delectation, I shall simply keep them for my own. You must content yourself with the explanation I have already given you of Sir Ambrose Tester and Lady Vandeleur: they are following—hand in hand, as it were—the path of duty. This will not prevent me from telling everything; on the contrary, don't you see?

## I

HIS brilliant prospects dated from the death of his brother, who had no children, had indeed steadily refused to marry. When I say brilliant prospects, I mean the vision of the baronetcy, one of the oldest in England, of a charming seventeenth-century house, with its park, in Dorsetshire, and a property worth some twenty thousand a year. Such a collection of items is still dazzling to me, even after what you would call, I suppose, a familiarity with British grandeur. My husband isn't a baronet (or we probably shouldn't be in London in December), and he is far, alas, from having twenty thousand a year. The full enjoyment of these luxuries, on Ambrose Tester's part, was dependent naturally on the death of his father, who was still very much to the fore at the time I first knew the young man. The proof of it is the way he kept nagging at his sons, as the younger used to say, on the question of taking a wife. The nagging had been of no avail, as I have mentioned, with regard to Francis, the elder, whose affections were centred (his brother himself told me) on the wine-cup and the faro-table. He was not a person to admire or imitate, and as the heir to an honourable name and a fine estate was very unsatisfactory indeed. It had been possible in those days to put him into the army, but it was not possible to keep him there, and he was still a very young man when it became

plain that any parental dream of a "career" for Frank Tester was exceedingly vain. Old Sir Edmund had thought matrimony would perhaps correct him, but a sterner process than this was needed, and it came to him one day at Monaco—he was most of the time abroad—after an illness so short that none of the family arrived in time. He was reformed altogether, he was utterly abolished. The second son, stepping into his shoes, was such an improvement that it was impossible there should be much simulation of mourning. You have seen him, you know what he is, there is very little mystery about him. As I am not going to show this composition to you, there is no harm in my writing here that he is—or, at any rate, he was—a remarkably attractive man. I don't say this because he made love to me, but precisely because he didn't. He was always in love with some one else—generally with Lady Vandeleur. You may say that in England that usually doesn't prevent; but Mr. Tester, though he had almost no intermissions, didn't, as a general thing, have duplicates. He was not provided with a second loved object, "under-studying," as they say, the part. It was his practice to keep me accurately informed of the state of his affections—a matter about which he was never in the least vague. When he was in love he knew it and rejoiced in it, and when by a miracle he was not he greatly regretted it. He expatiated to me on the charms of other persons, and this interested me much more than if he had attempted to direct the conversation to my own, as regards which I had no illusions. He has told me some singular things, and I think I may say that for a considerable period my most valued knowledge of English society was extracted from this genial youth. I suppose he usually found me a woman of good counsel, for certain it is that he has appealed to me for the light

of wisdom in very extraordinary predicaments. In his earlier years he was perpetually in hot water ; he tumbled into scrapes as children tumble into puddles. He invited them, he invented them ; and when he came to tell you how his trouble had come about (and he always told the whole truth) it was difficult to believe that a man should have been so idiotic.

And yet he was not an idiot ; he was supposed to be very clever, and certainly is very quick and amusing. He was only reckless, and extraordinarily natural, as natural as if he had been an Irishman. In fact, of all the Englishmen that I have known he is the most Irish in temperament (though he has got over it comparatively of late). I used to tell him that it was a great inconvenience that he didn't speak with a brogue, because then we should be forewarned and know with whom we were dealing. He replied that, by analogy, if he were Irish enough to have a brogue he would probably be English ; which seemed to me an answer wonderfully in character. Like most young Britons of his class he went to America, to see the great country, before he was twenty, and he took a letter to my father, who had occasion, *à propos* of some pickle, of course, to render him a considerable service. This led to his coming to see me—I had already been living here three or four years—on his return ; and that, in the course of time, led to our becoming fast friends, without, as I tell you, the smallest philandering on either side. But I mustn't protest too much ; I shall excite your suspicion. " If he has made love to so many women, why shouldn't he have made love to you ? "—some inquiry of that sort you will be likely to make. I have answered it already, " Simply on account of those very engagements." He couldn't make love to every one, and with me it wouldn't have done him the least good. It was a more amiable weakness

than his brother's, and he has always behaved very well. How well he behaved on a very important occasion is precisely the subject of my story.

He was supposed to have embraced the diplomatic career, had been secretary of legation at some German capital ; but after his brother's death he came home and looked out for a seat in Parliament. He found it with no great trouble, and has kept it ever since. No one would have the heart to turn him out, he is so good-looking. It's a great thing to be represented by one of the handsomest men in England, it creates such a favourable association of ideas. Any one would be amazed to discover that the borough he sits for, and the name of which I am always forgetting, is not a very pretty place. I have never seen it, and have no idea that it isn't, and I am sure he will survive every revolution. The people must feel that if they shouldn't keep him some monster would be returned. You remember his appearance, how tall, and fair, and strong he is, and always laughing, yet without looking silly. He is exactly the young man girls in America figure to themselves—in the place of the hero—when they read English novels and wish to imagine something very aristocratic and Saxon. A "bright Bostonian" who met him once at my house, exclaimed as soon as he had gone out of the room, "At last, at last, I behold it, the moustache of Roland Tremayne!"

"Of Roland Tremayne?"

"Don't you remember in *A Lawless Love*, how often it's mentioned, and how glorious and golden it was? Well, I have never seen it till now, but now I *have* seen it!"

If you hadn't seen Ambrose Tester, the best description I could give of him would be to say that he looked like Roland Tremayne. I don't know whether that hero was a "strong Liberal," but this is what

Sir Ambrose is supposed to be. (He succeeded his father two years ago, but I shall come to that.) He is not exactly what I should call thoughtful, but he is interested, or thinks he is, in a lot of things that I don't understand, and that one sees and skips in the newspapers — volunteering, and redistribution, and sanitation, and the representation of minors—minorities—what is it? When I said just now that he is always laughing, I ought to have explained that I didn't mean when he is talking to Lady Vandeleur. She makes him serious, makes him almost solemn; by which I don't mean that she bores him. Far from it; but when he is in her company he is thoughtful; he pulls his golden moustache, and Roland Tremayne looks as if his vision were turned in, and he were meditating on her words. He doesn't say much himself; it is she—she used to be so silent—who does the talking. She has plenty to say to him; she describes to him the charms that she discovers in the path of duty. He seldom speaks in the House, I believe, but when he does it's off-hand, and amusing, and sensible, and every one likes it. He will never be a great statesman, but he will add to the softness of Dorsetshire, and remain, in short, a very gallant, pleasant, prosperous, typical English gentleman, with a name, a fortune, a perfect appearance, a devoted, bewildered little wife, a great many reminiscences, a great many friends (including Lady Vandeleur and myself), and, strange to say, with all these advantages, something that faintly resembles a conscience.



## II

FIVE years ago he told me his father insisted on his marrying—would not hear of his putting it off any longer. Sir Edmund had been harping on this string ever since he came back from Germany, had made it both a general and a particular request, not only urging him to matrimony in the abstract, but pushing him into the arms of every young woman in the country. Ambrose had promised, procrastinated, temporised; but at last he was at the end of his evasions, and his poor father had taken the tone of supplication. “He thinks immensely of the name, of the place, and all that, and he has got it into his head that if I don’t marry before he dies I won’t marry after.” So much I remember Ambrose Tester said to me. “It’s a fixed idea; he has got it on the brain. He wants to see me married with his eyes, and he wants to take his grandson in his arms. Not without that will he be satisfied that the whole thing will go straight. He thinks he is nearing his end, but he isn’t—he will live to see a hundred, don’t you think so?—and he has made me a solemn appeal to put an end to what he calls his suspense. He has an idea some one will get hold of me—some woman I can’t marry. As if I were not old enough to take care of myself!”

“Perhaps he is afraid of me,” I suggested, facetiously.

## THE PATH OF DUTY

"No, it isn't you," said my visitor, betraying by his tone that it was some one, though he didn't say whom. "That's all rot, of course; one marries sooner or later, and I shall do like every one else. If I marry before I die it's as good as if I marry before he dies, isn't it? I should be delighted to have the governor at my wedding, but it isn't necessary for the legality, is it?"

I asked him what he wished me to do, and how I could help him. He knew already my peculiar views, that I was trying to get husbands for all the girls of my acquaintance and to prevent the men from taking wives. The sight of an unmarried woman afflicted me, and yet when my male friends changed their state I took it as a personal offence. He let me know that, so far as he was concerned, I must prepare myself for this injury, for he had given his father his word that another twelvemonth should not see him a bachelor. The old man had given him *carte blanche*, he made no condition beyond exacting that the lady should have youth and health. Ambrose Tester, at any rate, had taken a vow, and now he was going seriously to look about him. I said to him that what must be must be, and that there were plenty of charming girls about the land, among whom he could suit himself easily enough. There was no better match in England, I said, and he would only have to make his choice. That, however, is not what I thought, for my real reflexions were summed up in the silent exclamation, "What a pity Lady Vandeleur isn't a widow!" I hadn't the smallest doubt that if she were he would marry her on the spot; and after he had gone I wondered considerably what *she* thought of this turn in his affairs. If it was disappointing to me, how little it must be to *her* taste! Sir Edmund had not been so much out of the way in fearing there might be

obstacles to his son's taking the step he desired. Margaret Vandeleur was an obstacle—I knew it as well as if Mr. Tester had told me.

I don't mean there was anything in their relation he might not freely have alluded to, for Lady Vandeleur, in spite of her beauty and her tiresome husband, was not a woman who could be accused of an indiscretion. Her husband was a pedant about trifles—the shape of his hat-brim, the *pose* of his coachman, and cared for nothing else; but she was as nearly a saint as one may be when one has rubbed shoulders for ten years with the best society in Europe. It is a characteristic of that society that even its saints are suspected, and I go too far in saying that little pin-pricks were not administered, in considerable numbers, to her reputation. But she didn't feel them, for, still more than Ambrose Tester, she was a person to whose happiness a good conscience was necessary. I should almost say that for her happiness it was sufficient, and, at any rate, it was only those who didn't know her that pretended to speak of her lightly. If one had the honour of her acquaintance one might have thought her rather shut up to her beauty and her grandeur, but one couldn't but feel there was something in her composition that would keep her from vulgar aberrations. Her husband was such a feeble type that she must have felt doubly she had been put upon her honour. To deceive such a man as that was to make him more ridiculous than he was already, and from such a result a woman bearing his name may very well have shrunk. Perhaps it would have been worse for Lord Vandeleur, who had every pretension of his order and none of its amiability, if he had been a better or, at least, a cleverer man. When a woman behaves so well she is not obliged to be careful, and there is no need of consulting appearances when one is one's self an

appearance. Lady Vandeleur accepted Ambrose Tester's attentions, and heaven knows they were frequent ; but she had such an air of perfect equilibrium that one couldn't see her, in imagination, bend responsive. Incense was incense, but one saw her sitting quite serene among the fumes. That honour of her acquaintance of which I just now spoke it had been given me to enjoy ; that is to say, I met her a dozen times in the season in a hot crowd, and we smiled sweetly and murmured a vague question or two, without hearing, or even trying to hear, each other's answer. If I knew that Ambrose Tester was perpetually in and out of her house and always arranging with her that they should go to the same places, I doubt whether she, on her side, knew how often he came to see me. I don't think he would have let her know, and am conscious, in saying this, that it indicated an advanced state of intimacy (with her, I mean).

I also doubt very much whether he asked her to look about, on his behalf, for a future Lady Tester. This request he was so good as to make of me ; but I told him I would have nothing to do with the matter. If Joscelind is unhappy, I am thankful to say the responsibility is not mine. I have found English husbands for two or three American girls, but providing English wives is a different affair. I know the sort of men that will suit women, but one would have to be very clever to know the sort of women that will suit men. I told Ambrose Tester that he must look out for himself, but, in spite of his promise, I had very little belief that he would do anything of the sort. I thought it probable that the old baronet would pass away without seeing a new generation come in ; though when I intimated as much to Mr. Tester, he made answer in substance (it was not quite so crudely said) that his father, old as

he was, would hold on till his bidding was done, and if it should not be done he would hold on out of spite. "Oh, he will tire me out": that I remember Ambrose Tester did say. I had done him injustice, for six months later he told me he was engaged. It had all come about very suddenly. From one day to the other the right young woman had been found. I forget who had found her; some aunt or cousin, I think; it had not been the young man himself. But when she was found, he rose to the occasion; he took her up seriously, he approved of her thoroughly, and I am not sure that he didn't fall a little in love with her, ridiculous (excuse my London tone) as this accident may appear. He told me that his father was delighted, and I knew afterwards that he had good reason to be. It was not till some weeks later that I saw the girl; but meanwhile I had received the pleasantest impression of her, and this impression came—must have come—mainly from what her intended told me. That proves that he spoke with some positiveness, spoke as if he really believed he was doing a good thing. I had it on my tongue's end to ask him how Lady Vandeleur liked her, but I fortunately checked this vulgar inquiry. He liked her, evidently, as I say; every one liked her, and when I knew her I liked her better even than the others. I like her to-day more than ever; it is fair you should know that, in reading this account of her situation. It doubtless colours my picture, gives a point to my sense of the strangeness of my little story.

Joscelind Bernardstone came of a military race, and had been brought up in camps—by which I don't mean she was one of those objectionable young women who are known as garrison-hacks. She was in the flower of her freshness, and had been kept in the tent, receiving, as an only daughter, the most "particular" education from the excellent Lady

## THE PATH OF DUTY

Emily (General Bernardstone married a daughter of Lord Clanduffy), who looks like a pink-faced rabbit, and is (after Joscelind) one of the nicest women I know. When I met them in a country-house, a few weeks after the marriage was "arranged," as they say here, Joscelind won my affections by saying to me, with her timid directness (the speech made me feel sixty years old), that she must thank me for having been so kind to Mr. Tester. You saw her at Doubleton, and you will remember that, though she has no regular beauty, many a prettier woman would be very glad to look like her. She is as fresh as a new-laid egg, as light as a feather, as strong as a mail-phaeton. She is perfectly mild, yet she is clever enough to be sharp if she would. I don't know that clever women are necessarily thought ill-natured, but it is usually taken for granted that amiable women are very limited. Lady Tester is a refutation of the theory, which must have been invented by a vixenish woman who was *not* clever. She has an adoration for her husband, which absorbs her without in the least making her silly, unless indeed it is silly to be modest, as in this brutal world I sometimes believe. Her modesty is so great that being unhappy has hitherto presented itself to her as a form of egotism—that egotism which she has too much delicacy to cultivate. She is by no means sure that, if being married to her beautiful baronet is not the ideal state she dreamed it, the weak point of the affair is not simply in her own presumption. It doesn't express her condition, at present, to say that she is unhappy or disappointed, or that she has a sense of injury. All this is latent; meanwhile, what is obvious is that she is bewildered—she simply doesn't understand, and her perplexity, to me, is unspeakably touching. She looks about her for some explanation, some light. She fixes her eyes on mine sometimes,

## THE PATH OF DUTY

and on those of other people, with a kind of searching dumbness, as if there were some chance that I—that they—may explain, may tell her what it is that has happened to her. I can explain very well—but not to her—only to you !



### III

IT was a brilliant match for Miss Bernardstone, who had no fortune at all, and all her friends were of the opinion that she had done very well. After Easter she was in London with her people, and I saw a good deal of them—in fact, I rather cultivated them. They might perhaps even have thought me a little patronising, if they had been given to thinking that sort of thing. But they were not; that is not in their line. English people are very apt to attribute motives—some of them attribute much worse ones than we poor simpletons in America recognise, than we have even heard of. But that is only some of them; others don't, but take everything literally and genially. That was the case with the Bernardstones; you could be sure that on their way home, after dining with you, they wouldn't ask each other how in the world any one could call you pretty, or say that many people *did* believe, all the same, that you had poisoned your grandfather.

Lady Emily was exceedingly gratified at her daughter's engagement; of course she was very quiet about it, she didn't clap her hands or drag in Mr. Tester's name; but it was easy to see that she felt a kind of maternal peace, an abiding satisfaction. The young man behaved as well as possible, was constantly seen with Joscelind, and smiled

down at her in the kindest, most protecting way. They looked beautiful together—you would have said it was a duty for people whose colour matched so well to marry. Of course he was immensely taken up, and didn't come very often to see me ; but he came sometimes, and when he sat there he had a look which I didn't understand at first. Presently I saw what it expressed ; in my drawing-room he was off duty, he had no longer to sit up and play a part ; he would lean back and rest and draw a long breath, and forget that the day of his execution was fixed. There was to be no indecent haste about the marriage ; it was not to take place till after the session, at the end of August. It puzzled me and rather distressed me that his heart shouldn't be a little more in the matter ; it seemed strange to be engaged to so charming a girl and yet go through with it as if it were simply a social duty. If one hadn't been in love with her at first, one ought to have been at the end of a week or two. If Ambrose Tester was not (and to me he didn't pretend to be), he carried it off, as I have said, better than I should have expected. He was a gentleman, and he behaved like a gentleman—with the added punctilio, I think, of being sorry for his betrothed. But it was difficult to see what, in the long run, he could expect to make of such a position. If a man marries an ugly, unattractive woman for reasons of state, the thing is comparatively simple ; it is understood between them, and he need have no remorse at not offering her a sentiment of which there has been no question. But when he picks out a charming creature to gratify his father and *les convenances*, it is not so easy to be happy in not being able to care for her. It seemed to me that it would have been much better for Ambrose Tester to bestow himself upon a girl who might

have given him an excuse for tepidity. His wife should have been healthy but stupid, prolific but morose. Did he expect to continue not to be in love with Joscelind, or to conceal from her the mechanical nature of his attentions? It was difficult to see how he could wish to do the one or succeed in doing the other. Did he expect such a girl as that would be happy if he didn't love her? and did he think himself capable of being happy if it should turn out that she was miserable? If she shouldn't be miserable—that is, if she should be indifferent, and, as they say, console herself, would he like that any better?

I asked myself all these questions and I should have liked to ask them of Mr. Tester; but I didn't, for after all he couldn't have answered them. Poor young man! he didn't pry into things as I do; he was not analytic, like us Americans, as they say in reviews. He thought he was behaving remarkably well, and so he was—for a man; that was the strange part of it. It had been proper that in spite of his reluctance he should take a wife, and he had dutifully set about it. As a good thing is better for being well done, he had taken the best one he could possibly find. He was enchanted with—with his young lady, you might ask? Not in the least; with himself; that is the sort of person a man is! Their virtues are more dangerous than their vices, and heaven preserve you when they want to keep a promise! It is never a promise to *you*, you will notice. A man will sacrifice a woman to live as a gentleman should, and then ask for your sympathy—for *him*! And I don't speak of the bad ones, but of the good. They, after all, are the worst. Ambrose Tester, as I say, didn't go into these details, but, synthetic as he might be, was conscious that his position was false. He felt that sooner or later, and rather sooner than

later, he would have to make it true—a process that couldn't possibly be agreeable. He would really have to make up his mind to care for his wife or not to care for her. What would Lady Vandeleur say to one alternative, and what would little Joscelind say to the other? That is what it was to have a pertinacious father and to be an accommodating son. With me it was easy for Ambrose Tester to be superficial, for, as I tell you, if I didn't wish to engage him, I didn't wish to disengage him, and I didn't insist. Lady Vandeleur insisted, I was afraid; to be with her was, of course, very complicated; even more than Miss Bernardstone she must have made him feel that his position was false. I must add that he once mentioned to me that she had told him he ought to marry. At any rate it is an immense thing to be a pleasant fellow. Our young fellow was so universally pleasant that, of course, his *fiancée* came in for her share. So did Lady Emily, suffused with hope, which made her pinker than ever; she told me he sent flowers even to her. One day in the Park, I was riding early; the Row was almost empty. I came up behind a lady and gentleman who were walking their horses, close to each other, side by side. In a moment I recognised her, but not before seeing that nothing could have been more benevolent than the way Ambrose Tester was bending over his future wife. If he struck me as a lover at that moment, of course he struck her so. But that isn't the way they ride to-day.

#### IV

ONE day, about the end of June, he came in to see me when I had two or three other visitors ; you know that even at that season I am almost always at home from six to seven. He had not been three minutes in the room before I saw that he was different—different from what he had been the last time, and I guessed that something had happened in relation to his marriage. My visitors didn't, unfortunately, and they stayed and stayed until I was afraid he would have to go away without telling me what, I was sure, he had come for. But he sat them out ; I think that, by exception, they didn't find him pleasant. After we were alone he abused them a little, and then he said, " Have you heard about Vandeleur ? He's very ill. She's awfully anxious." I hadn't heard, and I told him so, asking a question or two ; then my inquiries ceased, my breath almost failed me, for I had become aware of something very strange. The way he looked at me when he told me his news was a full confession—a confession so full that I had needed a moment to take it in. He was not too strong a man to be taken by surprise — not so strong but that in the presence of an unexpected occasion his first movement was to look about for a little help. I venture to call it help, the sort of thing he came to me for on that summer afternoon. It is always help when a woman who

is not an idiot lets an embarrassed man take up her time. If he too is not an idiot, that doesn't diminish the service ; on the contrary his superiority to the average helps him to profit. Ambrose Tester had said to me more than once, in the past, that he was capable of telling me things, because I was an American, that he wouldn't confide to his own people. He had proved it before this, as I have hinted, and I must say that being an American, with him, was sometimes a questionable honour. I don't know whether he thinks us more discreet and more sympathetic (if he keeps up the system : he has abandoned it with me), or only more insensible, more proof against shocks ; but it is certain that, like some other Englishmen I have known, he has appeared, in delicate cases, to think I would take a comprehensive view. When I have inquired into the grounds of this discrimination in our favour, he has contented himself with saying, in the British-cursory manner, " Oh, I don't know ; you are different ! " I remember he remarked once that our impressions were fresher. And I am sure that now it was because of my nationality, in addition to other merits, that he treated me to the confession I have just alluded to. At least I don't suppose he would have gone about saying to people in general, " Her husband will probably die, you know ; then why shouldn't I marry Lady Vandeleur ? "

That was the question which his whole expression and manner asked of me, and of which, after a moment, I decided to take no notice. Why shouldn't he ? There was an excellent reason why he shouldn't. It would just kill Joscelind Bernardstone ; that was why he shouldn't ! The idea that he should be ready to do it frightened me, and, independent as he might think my point of view, I had no desire to discuss such abominations. It struck me as an abomination at this very first moment, and I have



never wavered in my judgement of it. I am always glad when I can take the measure of a thing as soon as I see it ; it's a blessing to *feel* what we think, without balancing and comparing. It's a great rest, too, and a great luxury. That, as I say, was the case with the feeling excited in me by this happy idea of Ambrose Tester's. Cruel and wanton I thought it then, cruel and wanton I thought it later, when it was pressed upon me. I knew there were many other people that didn't agree with me, and I can only hope for them that their conviction was as quick and positive as mine ; it all depends upon the way a thing strikes one. But I will add to this another remark. I thought I was right then, and I still think I was right ; but it strikes me as a pity that I should have wished so much to be right. Why couldn't I be content to be wrong ? to renounce my influence (since I appeared to possess the mystic article), and let my young friend do as he liked ? As you observed the situation at Doubleton, shouldn't you say it was of a nature to make one wonder whether, after all, one did render a service to the younger lady ?

At all events, as I say, I gave no sign to Ambrose Tester that I understood him, that I guessed what he wished to come to. He got no satisfaction out of me that day ; it is very true that he made up for it later. I expressed regret at Lord Vandeleur's illness, inquired into its nature and origin, hoped it wouldn't prove as grave as might be feared, said I would call at the house and ask about him, commiserated discreetly her ladyship, and, in short, gave my young man no chance whatever. He knew that I had guessed his *arrière-pensée*, but he let me off for the moment, for which I was thankful ; either because he was still ashamed of it, or because he supposed I was reserving myself for the catastrophe—should it



occur. Well, my dear, it did occur, at the end of ten days. Mr. Tester came to see me twice in that interval, each time to tell me that poor Vandeleur was worse ; he had some internal inflammation which, in nine cases out of ten, is fatal. His wife was all devotion ; she was with him night and day. I had the news from other sources as well ; I leave you to imagine whether in London, at the height of the season, such a situation could fail to be considerably discussed. To the discussion as yet, however, I contributed little, and with Ambrose Tester nothing at all. I was still on my guard. I never admitted for a moment that it was possible there should be any change in his plans. By this time, I think, he had quite ceased to be ashamed of his idea, he was in a state almost of exultation about it ; but he was very angry with me for not giving him an opening.

As I look back upon the matter now, there is something almost amusing in the way we watched each other—he thinking that I evaded his question only to torment him (he believed me, or pretended to believe me, capable of this sort of perversity), and I determined not to lose ground by betraying an insight into his state of mind which he might twist into an expression of sympathy. I wished to leave my sympathy where I had placed it, with Lady Emily and her daughter, of whom I continued, bumping against them at parties, to have some observation. They gave no signal of alarm ; of course it would have been premature. The girl, I am sure, had no idea of the existence of a rival. How they had kept her in the dark I don't know ; but it was easy to see she was too much in love to suspect or to criticise. With Lady Emily it was different ; she was a woman of charity, but she touched the world at too many points not to feel its vibrations. However, the dear little lady planted herself firmly ;

to the eye she was still enough. It was not from Ambrose Tester that I first heard of Lord Vandeleur's death ; it was announced, with a quarter of a column of "padding," in the *Times*. I have always known the *Times* was a wonderful journal, but this never came home to me so much as when it produced a quarter of a column about Lord Vandeleur. It was a triumph of word-spinning. If he had carried out his vocation, if he had been a tailor or a hatter (that's how I see him), there might have been something to say about him. But he missed his vocation, he missed everything but posthumous honours. I was so sure Ambrose Tester would come in that afternoon, and so sure he knew I should expect him, that I threw over an engagement on purpose. But he didn't come in, nor the next day, nor the next. There were two possible explanations of his absence. One was that he was giving all his time to consoling Lady Vandeleur ; the other was that he was giving it all, as a blind, to Joscelind Bernardstone. Both proved incorrect, for when he at last turned up he told me he had been for a week in the country, at his father's. Sir Edmund also had been unwell ; but he had pulled through better than poor Lord Vandeleur. I wondered at first whether his son had been talking over with him the question of a change of base ; but guessed in a moment that he had not suffered this alarm. I don't think that Ambrose would have spared him if he had thought it necessary to give him warning ; but he probably held that his father would have no ground for complaint so long as he should marry some one ; would have no right to remonstrate if he simply transferred his contract. Lady Vandeleur had had two children (whom she had lost), and might, therefore, have others whom she shouldn't lose ; that would have been a reply to nice discriminations on Sir Edmund's part.

## V

IN reality what the young man had been doing was thinking it over beneath his ancestral oaks and beeches. His countenance showed this—showed it more than Miss Bernardstone could have liked. He looked like a man who was crossed, not like a man who was happy, in love. I was no more disposed than before to help him out with his plot, but at the end of ten minutes we were articulately discussing it. When I say *we* were, I mean he was ; for I sat before him quite mute, at first, and amazed at the clearness with which, before his conscience, he had argued his case. He had persuaded himself that it was quite a simple matter to throw over poor Joscelind and keep himself free for the expiration of Lady Vandeleur's term of mourning. The deliberations of an impulsive man sometimes land him in strange countries. Ambrose Tester confided his plan to me as a tremendous secret. He professed to wish immensely to know how it appeared to me, and whether my woman's wit couldn't discover for him some loophole big enough round, some honourable way of not keeping faith. Yet at the same time he seemed not to foresee that I should, of necessity, be simply horrified. Disconcerted and perplexed (a little), that he was prepared to find me ; but if I had refused, as yet, to come to his assistance, he appeared to suppose it was only because of the real

difficulty of suggesting to him that perfect pretext of which he was in want. He evidently counted upon me, however, for some illuminating proposal, and I think he would have liked to say to me, "You have always pretended to be a great friend of mine"—I hadn't; the pretension was all on his side—"and now is your chance to show it. Go to Joscelind and make her feel (women have a hundred ways of doing that sort of thing) that through Vandeleur's death the change in my situation is complete. If she is the girl I take her for, she will know what to do in the premises."

I was not prepared to oblige him to this degree, and I lost no time in telling him so, after my first surprise at seeing how definite his purpose had become. His contention, after all, was very simple. He had been in love with Lady Vandeleur for years, and was now more in love with her than ever. There had been no appearance of her being, within a calculable period, liberated by the death of her husband. This nobleman was—he didn't say what just then (it was too soon)—but he was only forty years old, and in such health and preservation as to make such a contingency infinitely remote. Under these circumstances, Ambrose had been driven, for the most worldly reasons—he was ashamed of them, pah!—into an engagement with a girl he didn't love, and didn't pretend to love. Suddenly the unexpected occurred; the woman he did love had become accessible to him, and all the relations of things were altered. Why shouldn't he alter too?—why shouldn't Miss Bernardstone alter, Lady Emily alter, and every one alter? It would be *wrong* in him to marry Joscelind in so changed a world—a moment's consideration would certainly assure me of that. He could no longer carry out his part of the bargain, and the transaction must stop before it went any

## THE PATH OF DUTY

further. If Joscelind knew, she would be the first to recognise this, and the thing for her now was to know.

"Go and tell her, then, if you are so sure of it," I said. "I wonder you have put it off so many days."

He looked at me with a melancholy eye. "Of course I know it's beastly awkward."

It was beastly awkward certainly; there I could quite agree with him, and this was the only sympathy he extracted from me. It was impossible to be less helpful, less merciful, to an embarrassed young man than I was on that occasion. But other occasions followed very quickly, on which Mr. Tester renewed his appeal with greater eloquence. He assured me that it was torture to be with his intended, and every hour that he didn't break off committed him more deeply and more fatally. I repeated only once my previous question—asked him only once why then he didn't tell her he had changed his mind. The inquiry was idle, was even unkind, for my young man was in a very tight place. He didn't tell her, simply because he couldn't, in spite of the anguish of feeling that his chance to right himself was rapidly passing away. When I asked him if Joscelind appeared to have guessed nothing he broke out, "How in the world can she guess when I am so kind to her? I am so sorry for her, poor little wretch, that I can't help being nice to her. And from the moment I am nice to her she thinks it's all right."

I could see perfectly what he meant by that, and I liked him more for this little generosity than I disliked him for his nefarious scheme. In fact, I didn't dislike him at all when I saw what an influence my judgement would have on him. I very soon gave him the full benefit of it. I had thought over his case with all the advantages of his own presentation of it, and it was impossible for me to see how he could decently get rid of the girl. That, as I have said, had

been my original opinion, and quickened reflexion only confirmed it. As I have also said, I hadn't in the least recommended him to become engaged ; but once he had done so I recommended him to abide by it. It was all very well being in love with Lady Vandeleur ; he might be in love with her, but he hadn't promised to marry her. It was all very well not being in love with Miss Bernardstone ; but, as it happened, he had promised to marry her, and in my country a gentleman was supposed to keep such promises. If it was a question of keeping them only so long as was convenient where would any of us be ? I assure you I became very eloquent and moral — yes, moral, I maintain the word, in spite of your perhaps thinking (as you are very capable of doing) that I ought to have advised him in just the opposite sense. It was not a question of love, but of marriage, for he had never promised to love poor Joscelind. It was useless his saying it was dreadful to marry without love ; he knew that he thought it, and the people he lived with thought it, nothing of the kind. Half his friends had married on those terms. “ Yes, and a pretty sight their private life presented ! ” That might be, but it was the first time I had ever heard him say it. A fortnight before he had been quite ready to do like the others. I knew what I thought, and I suppose I expressed it with some clearness, for my arguments made him still more uncomfortable, unable as he was either to accept them or to act in contempt of them. Why he should have cared so much for my opinion is a mystery I can't elucidate ; to understand my little story you must simply swallow it. That he did care is proved by the exasperation with which he suddenly broke out, “ Well, then, as I understand you, what you recommend me is to marry Miss Bernardstone, and carry on an intrigue with Lady Vandeleur ! ”



## THE PATH OF DUTY

He knew perfectly that I recommended nothing of the sort, and he must have been very angry to indulge in this *boutade*. He told me that other people didn't think as I did—that every one was of the opinion that between a woman he didn't love and a woman he had adored for years it was a plain moral duty not to hesitate. "Don't hesitate, then!" I exclaimed; but I didn't get rid of him with this, for he returned to the charge more than once (he came to me so often that I thought he must neglect both his other alternatives), and let me know again that the voice of society was quite against my view. You will doubtless be surprised at such an intimation that he had taken "society" into his confidence, and wonder whether he went about asking people whether they thought he might back out. I can't tell you exactly, but I know that for some weeks his dilemma was a great deal talked about. His friends perceived he was at the parting of the roads, and many of them had no difficulty in saying which one *they* would take. Some observers thought he ought to do nothing, to leave things as they were. Others took very high ground and discoursed upon the sanctity of love and the wickedness of really deceiving the girl, as that would be what it would amount to (if he should lead her to the altar). Some held that it was too late to escape, others maintained that it is never too late. Some thought Miss Bernardstone very much to be pitied; some reserved their compassion for Ambrose Tester; others, still, lavished it upon Lady Vandeleur. The prevailing opinion, I think, was that he ought to obey the promptings of his heart—London cares so much for the heart! Or is it that London is simply ferocious, and always prefers the spectacle that is more entertaining? As it would prolong the drama for the young man to throw over Miss Bernardstone, there was a



considerable readiness to see the poor girl sacrificed. She was like a Christian maiden in the Roman arena. That is what Ambrose Tester meant by telling me that public opinion was on his side. I don't think he chattered about his quandary, but people, knowing his situation, guessed what was going on in his mind, and he, on his side, guessed what they said. London discussions might as well go on in the whispering-gallery of St. Paul's.

I could, of course, do only one thing—I could but reaffirm my conviction that the Roman attitude, as I may call it, was cruel, was falsely sentimental. This naturally didn't help him as he wished to be helped—didn't remove the obstacle to his marrying in a year or two Lady Vandeleur. Yet he continued to look to me for inspiration—I must say it at the cost of making him appear a very feeble-minded gentleman. There was a moment when I thought him capable of an oblique movement, of temporising with a view to escape. If he succeeded in postponing his marriage long enough, the Bernardstones would throw *him* over, and I suspect that for a day he entertained the idea of fixing this responsibility on them. But he was too honest and too generous to do so for longer, and his destiny was staring him in the face when an accident gave him a momentary relief. General Bernardstone died, after an illness as sudden and short as that which had carried off Lord Vandeleur ; his wife and daughter were plunged into mourning and immediately retired into the country. A week later we heard that the girl's marriage would be put off for several months—partly on account of her mourning and partly because her mother, whose only companion she had now become, could not bear to part with her at the time originally fixed and actually so near. People of course looked at each other—said it was the beginning of the end,

## THE PATH OF DUTY

a "dodge" of Ambrose Tester's. I wonder they didn't accuse him of poisoning the poor old general. I know to a certainty that he had nothing to do with the delay, that the proposal came from Lady Emily, who, in her bereavement, wished, very naturally, to keep a few months longer the child she was going to lose for ever. It must be said, in justice to her prospective son-in-law, that he was capable either of resigning himself or of frankly (with however many blushes) telling Joscelind he couldn't keep his agreement, but was not capable of trying to wriggle out of his difficulty. The plan of simply telling Joscelind he couldn't—this was the one he had fixed upon as the best, and this was the one of which I remarked to him that it had a defect which should be counted against its advantages. The defect was that it would kill Joscelind on the spot.

I think he believed me, and his believing me made this unexpected respite very welcome to him. There was no knowing what might happen in the interval, and he passed a large part of it in looking for an issue. And yet, at the same time, he kept up the usual forms with the girl whom in his heart he had renounced. I was told more than once (for I had lost sight of the pair during the summer and autumn) that these forms were at times very casual, that he neglected Miss Bernardstone most flagrantly, and had quite resumed his old intimacy with Lady Vandeleur. I don't exactly know what was meant by this, for she spent the first three months of her widowhood in complete seclusion, in her own old house in Norfolk, where he certainly was not staying with her. I believe he stayed some time, for the partridge-shooting, at a place a few miles off. It came to my ears that if Miss Bernardstone didn't take the hint it was because she was determined to stick to him through thick and thin. She never

## THE PATH OF DUTY

offered to let him off, and I was sure she never would ; but I was equally sure that, strange as it may appear, he had not ceased to be nice to her. I have never exactly understood why he didn't hate her, and I am convinced that he was not a comedian in his conduct to her—he was only a good fellow. I have spoken of the satisfaction that Sir Edmund took in his daughter-in-law that was to be ; he delighted in looking at her, longed for her when she was out of his sight, and had her, with her mother, staying with him in the country for weeks together. If Ambrose was not so constantly at her side as he might have been, this deficiency was covered by his father's devotion to her, by her appearance of being already one of the family. Mr. Tester was away as he might be away if they were already married.

## VI

IN October I met him at Doubleton ; we spent three days there together. He was enjoying his respite, as he didn't scruple to tell me, and he talked to me a great deal—as usual—about Lady Vandeleur. He didn't mention Joscelind, except by implication, in this assurance of how much he valued his weeks of grace.

“ Do you mean to say that, under the circumstances, Lady Vandeleur is willing to marry you ? ”

I made this inquiry more expressively, doubtless, than before ; for when we had talked of the matter then he had naturally spoken of her consent as a simple contingency. It was contingent upon the lapse of the first months of her bereavement ; it was not a question he could begin to press a few days after her husband's death.

“ Not immediately, of course, but if I wait I think so.” That, I remember, was his answer.

“ If you wait till you get rid of that poor girl, of course.”

“ She knows nothing about that—it's none of her business.”

“ Do you mean to say she doesn't know you are engaged ? ”

“ How should she know it, how should she believe it, when she sees how I love her ? ” the young man exclaimed ; but he admitted afterwards that he had

not deceived her, and that she rendered full justice to the motives that had determined him. He thought he could answer for it that she would marry him some day or other.

"Then she is a very cruel woman," I said, "and I should like, if you please, to hear no more about her." He protested against this, and, a month later, brought her up again, for a purpose. The purpose, you will see, was a very strange one. I had then come back to town; it was the early part of December. I supposed he was hunting, with his own hounds; but he appeared one afternoon in my drawing-room and told me I should do him a great favour if I would go and see Lady Vandeleur.

"Go and see her? where do you mean, in Norfolk?"

"She has come up to London—didn't you know it? She has a lot of business. She will be kept here till Christmas; I wish you would go."

"Why should I go?" I asked. "Won't you be kept here till Christmas too, and isn't that company enough for her?"

"Upon my word, you are cruel," he said, "and it's a great shame of you, when a man is trying to do his duty and is behaving like a saint."

"Is that what you call saintly, spending all your time with Lady Vandeleur? I will tell you whom I think a saint, if you would like to know."

"You needn't tell me, I know it better than you. I haven't a word to say against her; only she is stupid and hasn't any perceptions. If I am stopping a bit in London you don't understand why; it's as if you hadn't any perceptions either! If I am here for a few days I know what I am about."

"Why should I understand?" I asked—not very candidly, because I should have been glad to. "It's your own affair, you know what you are about,

as you say, and of course you have counted the cost."

"What cost do you mean? It's a pretty cost, I can tell you." And then he tried to explain—if I would only enter into it, and not be so suspicious. He was in London for the express purpose of breaking off.

"Breaking off what—your engagement?"

"No, no, damn my engagement—the other thing. My acquaintance, my relations——"

"Your intimacy with Lady Van——?" It was not very gentle, but I believe I burst out laughing. "If this is the way you break off, pray, what would you do to keep up?"

He flushed, and looked both foolish and angry, for of course it was not very difficult to see my point. But he was—in a very clumsy manner of his own—trying to cultivate a good conscience, and he was getting no credit for it. "I suppose I may be allowed to look at her! It's a matter we have to talk over. One doesn't drop such a friend in half an hour."

"One doesn't drop her at all, unless one has the strength to make a sacrifice."

"It's easy for you to talk of sacrifice. You don't know what she is!" my visitor cried.

"I think I know what she is not. She is not a friend, as you call her, if she encourages you in the wrong, if she doesn't help you. No, I have no patience with her," I declared; "I don't like her, and I won't go to see her!"

Mr. Tester looked at me a moment, as if he were too vexed to trust himself to speak. He had to make an effort not to say something rude. That effort, however, he was capable of making, and though he held his hat as if he were going to walk out of the house, he ended by staying, by putting it

down again, by leaning his head, with his elbows on his knees, in his hands, and groaning out that he had never heard of anything so impossible, and that he was the most wretched man in England. I was very sorry for him, and of course I told him so ; but privately I didn't think he stood up to his duty as he ought. I said to him, however, that if he would give me his word of honour that he would not abandon Miss Bernardstone, there was no trouble I wouldn't take to be of use to him. I didn't think Lady Vandeleur was behaving well. He must allow me to repeat that ; but if going to see her would give him any pleasure (of course there was no question of pleasure for *her*) I would go fifty times. I couldn't imagine how it would help him, but I would do it, as I would do anything else he asked me. He didn't give me his word of honour, but he said quietly, "*I shall go straight ; you needn't be afraid*" ; and as he spoke there was honour enough in his face. This left an opening, of course, for another catastrophe. There might be further postponements, and poor Lady Emily, indignant for the first time in her life, might declare that her daughter's situation had become intolerable, and that they withdrew from the engagement. But this was too odious a chance, and I accepted Mr. Tester's assurance. He told me that the good I could do by going to see Lady Vandeleur was that it would cheer her up, in that dreary, big house in Upper Brook Street, where she was absolutely alone, with horrible overalls on the furniture, and newspapers — actually newspapers — on the mirrors. She was seeing no one, there was no one to see ; but he knew she would see me. I asked him if she knew, then, he was to speak to me of coming, and whether I might allude to him, whether it was not too delicate. I shall never forget his answer to this, nor the tone in which he made it, blushing a little and looking



away. "Allude to me? Rather!" It was not the most fatuous speech I had ever heard; it had the effect of being the most modest; and it gave me an odd idea, and especially a new one, of the condition in which, at any time, one might be destined to find Lady Vandeleur. If she, too, were engaged in a struggle with her conscience (in this light they were an edifying pair!) it had perhaps changed her considerably, made her more approachable; and I reflected, ingeniously, that it probably had a humanising effect upon her. Ambrose Tester didn't go away after I had told him that I would comply with his request. He lingered, fidgeting with his stick and gloves, and I perceived that he had more to tell me, and that the real reason why he wished me to go and see Lady Vandeleur was not that she had newspapers on her mirrors. He came out with it at last, for that "Rather!" of his (with the way I took it) had broken the ice.

"You say you don't think she behaves well" (he naturally wished to defend her). "But I daresay you don't understand her position. Perhaps you wouldn't behave any better in her place."

"It's very good of you to imagine me there!" I remarked, laughing.

"It's awkward for me to say. One doesn't want to dot one's i's to that extent."

"She would be delighted to marry you. That's not such a mystery."

"Well, she likes me awfully," Mr. Tester said, looking like a handsome child. "It's not all on one side, it's on both. That's the difficulty."

"You mean she won't let you go?—she holds you fast?"

But the poor fellow had, in delicacy, said enough, and at this he jumped up. He stood there a moment, smoothing his hat; then he broke out again. "Please

## THE PATH OF DUTY

do this. Let her know—make her feel. You can bring it in, you know.” And here he paused, embarrassed.

“What can I bring in, Mr. Tester? That’s the difficulty, as you say.”

“What you told me the other day. You know. What you have told me before.”

“What I have told you . . . ? ”

“That it would put an end to Joscelind! If you can’t work round to it, what’s the good of being—you?” And with this tribute to my powers he took his departure.

## VII

IT was all very well of him to be so flattering, but I really didn't see myself talking in that manner to Lady Vandeleur. I wondered why he didn't give her this information himself, and what particular value it could have as coming from me. Then I said to myself that of course he *had* mentioned to her the truth I had impressed upon him (and which by this time he had evidently taken home), but that to enable it to produce its full effect upon Lady Vandeleur the further testimony of a witness more independent was required. There was nothing for me but to go and see her, and I went the next day, fully conscious that to execute Mr. Tester's commission I should have either to find myself very brave or to find her strangely confidential ; and fully prepared, also, not to be admitted. But she received me, and the house in Upper Brook Street was as dismal as Ambrose Tester had represented it. The December fog (the afternoon was very dusky) seemed to pervade the muffled rooms, and her ladyship's pink lamp-light to waste itself in the brown atmosphere. He had mentioned to me that the heir to the title (a cousin of her husband), who had left her unmolested for several months, was now taking possession of everything, so that what kept her in town was the business of her "turning out," and certain formalities connected with her dower. This

was very ample, and the large provision made for her included the London house. She was very gracious on this occasion, but she certainly had remarkably little to say. Still, she was different, or, at any rate (having taken that hint), I saw her differently. I saw, indeed, that I had never quite done her justice, that I had exaggerated her stiffness, attributed to her a kind of conscious grandeur which was in reality much more an accident of her appearance, of her figure, than a quality of her character. Her appearance is as grand as you know, and on the day I speak of, in her simplified mourning, under those vaguely-gleaming *lambris*, she looked as beautiful as a great white lily. She is very simple and good-natured ; she will never make an advance, but she will always respond to one, and I saw, that evening, that the way to get on with her was to treat her as if she were not too imposing. I saw also that, with her nun-like robes and languid eyes, she was a woman who might be immensely in love. All the same, we hadn't much to say to each other. She remarked that it was very kind of me to come, that she wondered how I could endure London at that season, that she had taken a drive and found the Park too dreadful, that she would ring for some more tea if I didn't like what she had given me. Our conversation wandered, stumbling a little, among these platitudes, but no allusion was made on either side to Ambrose Tester. Nevertheless, as I have said, she was different, though it was not till I got home that I phrased to myself what I had detected.

Then, recalling her white face, and the deeper, stranger expression of her beautiful eyes, I entertained myself with the idea that she was under the influence of "suppressed exaltation." The more I thought of her the more she appeared to me not natural ; wound up, as it were, to a calmness beneath which there was

a deal of agitation. This would have been nonsense if I had not, two days afterwards, received a note from her which struck me as an absolutely "exalted" production. Not superficially, of course; to the casual eye it would have been perfectly commonplace. But this was precisely its peculiarity, that Lady Vandeleur should have written me a note which had no apparent point save that she should like to see me again, a desire for which she did succeed in assigning a reason. She reminded me that she was paying no calls, and she hoped I wouldn't stand on ceremony, but come in very soon again, she had enjoyed my visit so much. We had not been on note-writing terms, and there was nothing in that visit to alter our relations; moreover, six months before, she would not have dreamed of addressing me in that way. I was doubly convinced, therefore, that she was passing through a crisis—that she was not in her normal equilibrium. Mr. Tester had not re-appeared since the occasion I have described at length, and I thought it possible he had been capable of the bravery of leaving town. I had, however, no fear of meeting him in Upper Brook Street; for, according to my theory of his relations with Lady Vandeleur he regularly spent his evenings with her, it being clear to me that they must dine together. I could answer her note only by going to see her the next day, when I found abundant confirmation of that idea about the crisis. I must confess to you in advance that I have never really understood her behaviour—never understood why she should have taken to me so suddenly—with whatever reserves, and however much by implication merely—into her confidence. All I can say is that this is an accident to which one is exposed with English people, who, in my opinion, and contrary to common report, are the most demonstrative, the most expansive, the most gushing in the

world. I think she felt rather isolated at this moment, and she had never had many intimates of her own sex. That sex, as a general thing, disapproved of her proceedings during the last few months, held that she was making Joscelind Bernardstone suffer too cruelly. She possibly felt the weight of this censure, and at all events was not above wishing some one to know that, whatever injury had fallen upon the girl to whom Mr. Tester had so stupidly engaged himself, had not, so far as she was concerned, been wantonly inflicted. I was there, I was more or less aware of her situation, and I would do as well as any one else.

She seemed really glad to see me, but she was very nervous. Nevertheless, nearly half an hour elapsed, and I was still wondering whether she had sent for me only to discuss the question of how a London house whose appointments had the stamp of a debased period (it had been thought very handsome in 1850) could be "done up" without being made esthetic. I forget what satisfaction I gave her on this point; I was asking myself how I could work round in the manner prescribed by Joscelind's intended. At the last, however, to my extreme surprise, Lady Vandeleur herself relieved me of this effort.

"I think you know Mr. Tester rather well," she remarked abruptly, irrelevantly, and with a face more conscious of the bearings of things than any I had ever seen her wear. On my confessing to such an acquaintance, she mentioned that Mr. Tester (who had been in London a few days—perhaps I had seen him) had left town and wouldn't come back for several weeks. This, for the moment, seemed to be all she had to communicate; but she sat looking at me from the corner of her sofa as if she wished me to profit in some way by the opportunity she had given me. Did she want help from outside, this proud, inscrutable

woman, and was she reduced to throwing out signals of distress? Did she wish to be protected against herself—applauded for such efforts as she had already made? I didn't rush forward, I was not precipitate, for I felt that now, surely, I should be able at my convenience to execute my commission. What concerned me was not to prevent Lady Vandeleur's marrying Mr. Tester, but to prevent Mr. Tester's marrying her. In a few moments—with the same irrelevance—she announced to me that he wished to, and asked whether I didn't know it. I saw that this was my chance, and instantly with extreme energy, I exclaimed:

“ Ah, for heaven's sake, don't listen to him! It would kill Miss Bernardstone! ”

The tone of my voice made her colour a little, and she repeated, “ Miss Bernardstone? ”

“ The girl he is engaged to—or has been—don't you know? Excuse me, I thought every one knew.”

“ Of course I know he is dreadfully entangled. He was fairly hunted down.” Lady Vandeleur was silent a moment, and then she added, with a strange smile, “ Fancy, in such a situation, his wanting to marry me! ”

“ Fancy! ” I replied. I was so struck with the oddity of her telling me her secrets that for the moment my indignation did not come to a head—my indignation, I mean, at her accusing poor Lady Emily (and even the girl herself) of having “ trapped ” our friend. Later I said to myself that I supposed she was within her literal right in abusing her rival, if she was trying sincerely to give him up. “ I don't know anything about his having been hunted down,” I said; “ but this I do know, Lady Vandeleur, I assure you, that if he should throw Joscelyn over she would simply go out like that! ” And I snapped my fingers.



## THE PATH OF DUTY

Lady Vandeleur listened to this serenely enough ; she tried at least to take the air of a woman who has no need of new arguments. " Do you know her very well ? " she asked, as if she had been struck by my calling Miss Bernardstone by her Christian name.

" Well enough to like her very much." I was going to say " to pity her " ; but I thought better of it.

" She must be a person of very little spirit. If a man were to jilt me, I don't think I should go out ! " cried her ladyship, with a laugh.

" Nothing is more probable than that she has not your courage or your wisdom. She may be weak, but she is passionately in love with him."

I looked straight into Lady Vandeleur's eyes as I said this, and I was conscious that it was a tolerably good description of my hostess.

" Do you think she would really die ? " she asked in a moment.

" Die as if one should stab her with a knife. Some people don't believe in broken hearts," I continued. " I didn't till I knew Joscelind Bernardstone ; then I felt that she had one that wouldn't be proof."

" One ought to live—one ought always to live," said Lady Vandeleur ; " and always to hold up one's head."

" Ah, I suppose that one oughtn't to feel at all, if one wishes to be a great success."

" What do you call a great success ? " she asked.

" Never having occasion to be pitied."

" Being pitied ? That must be odious ! " she said ; and I saw that though she might wish for admiration, she would never wish for sympathy. Then, in a moment, she added that men, in her opinion, were very base—a remark that was deep, but not, I think, very honest ; that is, in so far as the purpose of it

## THE PATH OF DUTY

had been to give me the idea that Ambrose Tester had done nothing but press her, and she had done nothing but resist. They were very odd, the discrepancies in the statements of each of this pair ; but it must be said for Lady Vandeleur that now that she had made up her mind (as I believed she had) to sacrifice herself, she really persuaded herself that she had not had a moment of weakness. She quite unbosomed herself, and I fairly assisted at her crisis. It appears that she had a conscience—very much so, and even a high ideal of duty. She represented herself as moving heaven and earth to keep Ambrose Tester up to the mark, and you would never have guessed from what she told me that she had entertained, ever so faintly, the idea of marrying him. I am sure this was a dreadful perversion, but I forgave it on the score of that exaltation of which I have spoken. The things she said, and the way she said them, come back to me, and I thought that if she looked as handsome as that when she preached virtue to Mr. Tester, it was no wonder he liked the sermon to be going on perpetually.

“ I daresay you know what old friends we are ; but that doesn’t make any difference, does it ? Nothing would induce me to marry him—I haven’t the smallest intention of marrying again. It is not a time for me to think of marrying, before his lordship has been dead six months. The girl is nothing to me ; I know nothing about her, and I don’t wish to know ; but I should be very, very sorry if she were unhappy. He is the best friend I ever had, but I don’t see that that’s any reason I should marry him, do you ? ” Lady Vandeleur appealed to me, but without waiting for my answers, asking advice in spite of herself, and then remembering it was beneath her dignity to appear to be in need of it. “ I have told him that if he doesn’t act properly I

## THE PATH OF DUTY

shall never speak to him again. She's a charming girl, every one says, and I have no doubt she will make him perfectly happy. Men don't feel things like women, I think, and if they are coddled and flattered they forget the rest. I have no doubt she is very sufficient for all that. For me, at any rate, once I see a thing in a certain way, I must abide by that. I think people are so dreadful—they do such horrible things. They don't seem to think what one's duty may be. I don't know whether you think much about that, but really one must at times, don't you think so? Every one is so selfish, and then, when they have never made an effort or a sacrifice themselves, they come to you and talk such a lot of hypocrisy. I know so much better than any one else whether I should marry or not. But I don't mind telling you that I don't see why I should. I am not in such a bad position—with my liberty and a decent maintenance."

In this manner she rambled on, gravely and communicatively, contradicting herself at times; not talking fast (she never did), but dropping one simple sentence, with an interval, after the other, with a certain richness of voice which always was part of the charm of her presence. She wished to be convinced against herself, and it was a comfort to her to hear herself argue. I was quite willing to be part of the audience, though I had to confine myself to very superficial remarks; for when I had said the event I feared would kill Miss Bernardstone I had said everything that was open to me. I had nothing to do with Lady Vandeleur's marrying, apart from that. I probably disappointed her. She had caught a glimpse of the moral beauty of self-sacrifice, of a certain ideal of conduct (I imagine it was rather new to her), and would have been glad to elicit from me, as a person of some experience of

## THE PATH OF DUTY

life, an assurance that such joys are not unsubstantial. I had no wish to wind her up to a spiritual ecstasy from which she would inevitably descend again, and I let her deliver herself according to her humour, without attempting to answer for it that she would find renunciation the road to bliss. I believed that if she should give up Mr. Tester she would suffer accordingly ; but I didn't think that a reason for not giving him up. Before I left her she said to me that nothing would induce her to do anything that she didn't think right. " It would be no pleasure to me, don't you see ? I should be always thinking that another way would have been better. Nothing would induce me—nothing, nothing ! "

## VIII

SHE protested too much, perhaps, but the event seemed to show that she was in earnest. I have described these two first visits of mine in some detail, but they were not the only ones I paid her. I saw her several times again, before she left town, and we became intimate, as London intimacies are measured. She ceased to protest (to my relief, for it made me nervous), she was very gentle, and gracious, and reasonable, and there was something in the way she looked and spoke that told me that for the present she found renunciation its own reward. So far, my scepticism was put to shame ; her spiritual ecstacy maintained itself. If I could have foreseen then that it would maintain itself till the present hour I should have felt that Lady Vandeleur's moral nature is finer indeed than mine. I heard from her that Mr. Tester remained at his father's, and that Lady Emily and her daughter were also there. The day for the wedding had been fixed, and the preparations were going rapidly forward. Meanwhile she didn't tell me, but I gathered it from things she dropped—she was in almost daily correspondence with the young man. I thought this a strange concomitant of his bridal arrangements ; but apparently, henceforth, they were bent on convincing each other that the torch of virtue lighted their steps, and they couldn't convince each other too much. She intimated to

me that she had now effectually persuaded him (always by letter) that he would fail terribly if he should try to found his happiness on an injury done to another, and that of course she could never be happy (in a union with him) with the sight of his wretchedness before her. That a good deal of correspondence should be required to elucidate this is perhaps after all not remarkable. One day, when I was sitting with her (it was just before she left town), she suddenly burst into tears. Before we parted I said to her that there were several women in London I liked very much—that was common enough—but for her I had a positive respect, and that was rare. My respect continues still, and it sometimes makes me furious.

About the middle of January Ambrose Tester reappeared in town. He told me he came to bid me good-bye. He was going to be beheaded. It was no use saying that old relations would be the same after a man was married; they would be different, everything would be different. I had wanted him to marry, and now I should see how I liked it. He didn't mention that I had also wanted him not to marry, and I was sure that if Lady Vandeleur had become his wife she would have been a much greater impediment to our harmless friendship than Joscelind Bernardstone would ever be. It took me but a short time to observe that he was in very much the same condition as Lady Vandeleur. He was finding how sweet it is to renounce, hand in hand with one we love. Upon him, too, the peace of the Lord had descended. He spoke of his father's delight at the nuptials being so near at hand; at the festivities that would take place in Dorsetshire when he should bring home his bride. The only allusion he made to what we had talked of the last time we were together was to exclaim suddenly, "How

can I tell you how easy she has made it? She is so sweet, so noble! She really is a perfect creature!" I took for granted that he was talking of his future wife, but in a moment, as we were at cross-purposes, perceived that he meant Lady Vandeleur. This seemed to me really ominous—it stuck in my mind after he had left me. I was half tempted to write him a note, to say, "There is, after all, perhaps, something worse than your jilting Miss Bernardstone; and that is the danger that your rupture with Lady Vandeleur may become more of a bond than your marrying her would have been. For heaven's sake, let your sacrifice *be* a sacrifice; keep it in its proper place!"

Of course I didn't write; even the slight responsibility I had already incurred began to frighten me, and I never saw Mr. Tester again till he was the husband of Joscelind Bernardstone. They have now been married some four years; they have two children, the elder of whom is, as he should be, a boy. Sir Edmund waited till his grandson had made good his place in the world, and then, feeling it was safe, he quietly, genially, surrendered his trust. He died, holding the hand of his daughter-in-law, and giving it doubtless a pressure which was an injunction to be brave. I don't know what he thought of the success of his plan for his son; but perhaps, after all, he saw nothing amiss, for Joscelind is the last woman in the world to have troubled him with her sorrows. From him, no doubt, she successfully concealed that bewilderment on which I have touched. You see I speak of her sorrows as if they were a matter of common recognition; certain it is that any one who meets her must see that she doesn't pass her life in joy. Lady Vandeleur, as you know, has never married again; she is still the most beautiful widow in England. She enjoys the esteem of every one, as



well as the approbation of her conscience, for every one knows the sacrifice she made, knows that she was even more in love with Sir Ambrose than he was with her. She goes out again, of course, as of old, and she constantly meets the baronet and his wife. She is supposed to be even "very nice" to Lady Tester, and she certainly treats her with exceeding civility. But you know (or perhaps you don't know) all the deadly things that, in London, may lie beneath that method. I don't in the least mean that Lady Vandeleur has any deadly intentions; she is a very good woman, and I am sure that in her heart she thinks she lets poor Joscelind off very easily. But the result of the whole situation is that Joscelind is in dreadful fear of her, for how can she help seeing that she has a very peculiar power over her husband? There couldn't have been a better occasion for observing the three together (if together it may be called, when Lady Tester is so completely outside) than those two days of ours at Doubleton. That's a house where they have met more than once before; I think she and Sir Ambrose like it. By "she" I mean, as he used to mean, Lady Vandeleur. You saw how Lady Tester was absolutely white with uneasiness. What can she do when she meets everywhere the implication that if two people in our time have distinguished themselves for their virtue, it is her husband and Lady Vandeleur? It is my impression that this pair are exceedingly happy. His marriage *has* made a difference, and I see him much less frequently and less intimately. But when I meet him I notice in him a kind of emanation of quiet bliss. Yes, they are certainly in felicity, they have trod the clouds together, they have soared into the blue, and they wear in their faces the glory of those altitudes. They encourage, they cheer, inspire, sustain each other; remind each other that

## THE PATH OF DUTY

they have chosen the better part. Of course they have to meet for this purpose, and their interviews are filled, I am sure, with its sanctity. He holds up his head, as a man may who on a very critical occasion behaved like a perfect gentleman. It is only poor Joscelind that droops. Haven't I explained to you now why she doesn't understand ?

A DAY OF DAYS



MR. HERBERT MOORE, a gentleman of the highest note in the scientific world, and a childless widower, finding himself at last unable to reconcile his sedentary habits with the management of a household, had invited his only sister to come and superintend his domestic affairs. Miss Adela Moore had assented the more willingly to his proposal as by her mother's death she had recently been left without a formal protector. She was twenty-five years of age, and was a very active member of what she and her friends called society. She was almost equally at home in the best company of three great cities, and she had encountered most of the adventures which await a young girl on the threshold of life. She had become rather hastily and imprudently engaged, but she had eventually succeeded in disengaging herself. She had spent a summer or two in Europe, and she had made a voyage to Cuba with a dear friend in the last stage of consumption, who had died at the hotel in the Havana. Although by no means perfectly beautiful in person she was yet thoroughly pleasing, rejoicing in what young ladies are fond of calling an *air* ; that is, she was tall and slender, with a long neck, a low forehead, and a handsome nose. Even after six years of the best company, too, she still had excellent manners. She was, moreover, mistress of a very pretty little fortune, and was accounted clever without detriment to her amiability and amiable without detriment to her wit. These facts, as the reader will

allow, might have ensured her the very best prospects ; but he has seen that she had found herself willing to forfeit her prospects and bury herself in the country. It seemed to her that she had seen enough of the world and of human nature, and that a period of seclusion might yield a fine refreshment. She had begun to suspect that for a girl of her age she was unduly old and wise—and, what is more, to suspect that others suspected as much. A great observer of life and manners, so far as her opportunities went, she conceived that it behoved her to organise the results of her observation into principles of conduct and belief. She was becoming—so she argued—too impersonal, too critical, too intelligent, too contemplative, too just. A woman had no business to be so just. The society of nature, of the great expansive skies and the primeval woods, would check the morbid development of her brain-power. She would spend her time in the fields and merely vegetate ; walk and ride, and read the old-fashioned books in Herbert's library.

She found her brother established in a very pretty house, at about a mile's distance from the nearest town, and at about six miles' distance from another town, the seat of a small but ancient college, before which he delivered a weekly lecture. She had seen so little of him of late years that his acquaintance was almost to make ; but there were no barriers to break down. Herbert Moore was one of the simplest and least aggressive of men, and one of the most patient and conscientious of students. He had had a vague notion that Adela was a young woman of extravagant pleasures, and that, somehow, on her arrival, his house would be overrun with the train of her attendant revellers. It was not until after they had been six months together that he became aware that his sister led almost an ascetic life. By the

## A DAY OF DAYS

time six months more had passed Adela had recovered a delightful sense of youth and *naïveté*. She learned, under her brother's tuition, to walk—nay, to climb, for there were great hills in the neighbourhood—to ride and to botanise. At the end of a year, in the month of August, she received a visit from an old friend, a girl of her own age, who had been spending July at a watering-place, and who was now about to be married. Adela had begun to fear that she had declined into an almost irreclaimable rusticity and had rubbed off the social facility, the “knowledge of the world” for which she was formerly distinguished; but a week spent in intimate conversation with her friend convinced her not only that she had not forgotten much that she had feared, but had also not forgotten much that she had hoped. For this, and other reasons, her friend's departure left her slightly depressed. She felt lonely and even a little elderly—she had lost another illusion. Laura Benton, for whom a year ago she had entertained a serious regard, now impressed her as a very flimsy little person, who talked about her lover with almost indecent flippancy.

Meanwhile, September was slowly running its course. One morning Mr. Moore took a hasty breakfast and started to catch the train for Slowfield, whither a scientific conference called him, which might, he said, release him that afternoon in time for dinner at home, or might, on the other hand, detain him till the night. It was almost the first time during the term of Adela's rustication that she had been left alone for several hours. Her brother's quiet presence was inappreciable enough; yet now that he was at a distance she felt a singular sense of freedom: a return of that condition of early childhood when, through some domestic catastrophe, she had for an infinite morning been left to her own



devices. What should she do? she asked herself, with the smile that she reserved for her maidenly monologues. It was a good day for work, but it was a still better one for play. Should she drive into town and call on a lot of tiresome local people? Should she go into the kitchen and try her hand at a pudding for dinner? She felt a delectable longing to do something illicit, to play with fire, to discover some Bluebeard's closet. But poor Herbert was no Bluebeard; if she were to burn down his house he would exact no amends. Adela went out to the verandah, and, sitting down on the steps, gazed across the country. It was apparently the last day of summer. The sky was faintly blue; the woody hills were putting on the morbid colours of autumn; the great pine-grove behind the house seemed to have caught and imprisoned the protesting breezes. Looking down the road toward the village, it occurred to Adela that she might have a visit, and so human was her mood that if any of the local people were to come to her she felt it was in her to humour them. As the sun rose higher she went in and established herself with a piece of embroidery in a deep bow-window, in the second story, which, betwixt its muslin curtains and its external framework of high-creeping plants, commanded most insidiously the principal approach to the house. While she drew her threads she surveyed the road with a deepening conviction that she was destined to have a caller. The air was warm, yet not hot; the dust had been laid during the night by a gentle rain. It had been from the first a source of complaint among Adela's new friends that she was equally gracious to all men, and, what was more remarkable, to all women. Not only had she dedicated herself to no friendships, but she had committed herself to no preferences. Nevertheless, it was with an imagination by no means severely

impartial that she sat communing with her open casement. She had very soon made up her mind that, to answer the requirements of the hour, her visitor must be of a sex as different as possible from her own ; and as, thanks to the few differences in favour of any individual she had been able to discover among the young males of the country-side, her roll-call in this her hour of need was limited to a single name, so her thoughts were now centred upon the bearer of that name, Mr. Weatherby Pynsent, the Unitarian minister. If instead of being Miss Moore's story this were Mr. Pynsent's, it might easily be condensed into the simple statement that he was very far gone indeed. Although affiliated to a richer ceremonial than his own she had been so well pleased with one of his sermons, to which she had allowed herself to lend a tolerant ear, that, meeting him some time afterward, she had received him with what she considered a rather knotty doctrinal question ; whereupon, gracefully waiving the question, he had asked permission to call upon her and talk over her "difficulties." This short interview had enshrined her in the young minister's heart ; and the half-a-dozen occasions on which he had subsequently contrived to see her had each contributed another candle to her altar. It is but fair to add, however, that, although a captive, Mr. Pynsent was as yet no captor. He was simply an honourable young parson, who happened at this moment to be the most sympathetic companion within reach. Adela, at twenty-five years of age, had both a past and a future. Mr. Pynsent reminded her of the one and gave her a foretaste of the other.

So, at last, when, as the morning waned toward noon, Adela descried in the distance a man's figure treading the grassy margin of the road, and swinging his stick as he came, she smiled to herself with some complacency. But even while she smiled she became

conscious that her heart was beating quite idiotically. She rose, and, resenting her gratuitous emotion, stood for a moment half resolved to see no one at all. As she did so she glanced along the road again. Her friend had drawn nearer, and as the distance lessened she began to perceive that he was not her friend. Before many moments her doubts were removed ; the gentleman was a stranger. In front of the house three roads went their different ways, and a spreading elm, tall and slim, like the feathery sheaf of a gleaner, with an ancient bench beneath it, made an informal *rond-point*. The stranger came along the opposite side of the highway, and when he reached the elm stopped and looked about him, as if to verify some direction that had been given him. Then he deliberately crossed over. Adela had time to see, unseen, that he was a robust young man, with a bearded chin and a soft white hat. After the due interval Becky the maid came up with a card somewhat rudely superscribed in pencil :

THOMAS LUDLOW,  
*New York.*

Turning it over in her fingers, Adela saw the gentleman had made use of the reverse of a paste-board abstracted from the basket on her own drawing-room table. The printed name on the other side was dashed out ; it ran : *Mr. Weatherby Pynsent*.

" He asked me to give you this, ma'am," said Becky. " He helped himself to it out of the tray."

" Did he ask for me by name ? "

" No, ma'am ; he asked for Mr. Moore. When I told him Mr. Moore was away, he asked for some of the family. I told him you was all the family, ma'am."

" Very well," said Adela, " I will go down." But,

begging her pardon, we will precede her by a few steps.

Tom Ludlow, as his friends called him, was a young man of twenty-eight, concerning whom you might have heard the most various opinions ; for, as far as he was known (which, indeed, was not very far), he was at once one of the best liked and one of the best hated of men. Born in one of the lower walks of New York life, he still seemed always to move in his native element. A certain crudity of manner and aspect proved him to belong to the great vulgar, muscular, popular majority. On this basis, however, he was a sufficiently good-looking fellow : a middle-sized, agile figure, a head so well shaped as to be handsome, a pair of inquisitive, responsive eyes, and a large, manly mouth, constituting the most expressive part of his equipment. Turned upon the world at an early age, he had, in the pursuit of a subsistence, tried his head at everything in succession, and had generally found it to be quite as hard as the opposing substance ; and his person may have been thought to reflect this experience in an air of taking success too much for granted. He was a man of strong faculties and a strong will, but it is doubtful whether his feelings were stronger than he. People liked him for his directness, his good-humour, his general soundness and serviceableness, and disliked him for the same qualities under different names ; that is, for his impudence, his offensive optimism, his inhuman avidity for facts. When his friends insisted upon his noble disinterestedness, his enemies were wont to reply it was all very well to ignore, to suppress, one's own sensibilities in the pursuit of knowledge, but to trample on the rest of mankind at the same time betrayed an excess of zeal. Fortunately for Ludlow, on the whole, he was no great listener, and even if he had

been, a certain plebeian thick-skinnedness would always have saved his tenderer parts ; although it must be added that, if, like a genuine democrat, he was very insensitive, like a genuine democrat, too, he was unexpectedly proud. His tastes, which had always been for the natural sciences, had recently led him to the study of fossil remains, the branch cultivated by Herbert Moore ; and it was upon business connected with this pursuit that, after a short correspondence, he had now come to see him.

As Adela went to him he came out from the window, where he had been looking at the lawn. She acknowledged the friendly nod which he apparently intended for a greeting.

" Miss Moore, I believe," said Ludlow.

" Miss Moore," said Adela.

" I beg your pardon for this intrusion, but as I have come from a distance to see Mr. Moore, on business, I thought I might venture either to ask at headquarters how he may most easily be reached, or even to give you a message for him." These words were accompanied with a smile under the influence of which it had been written on the scroll of Adela's fate that she was to descend from her pedestal.

" Pray make no apologies," she said. " We hardly recognise such a thing as intrusion in this simple little place. Won't you sit down ? My brother went away only this morning, and I expect him back this afternoon."

" This afternoon ? indeed. In that case I believe I'll wait. It was very stupid of me not to have dropped a word beforehand. But I have been in the city all summer long, and I shall not be sorry to squeeze a little vacation out of this business. I'm tremendously fond of the country, and I have been working for many months in a musty museum."

" It's possible that my brother may not come home

until the evening," Adela said. "He was uncertain. You might go to him at Slowfield."

Ludlow reflected a moment, with his eyes on his hostess. "If he does return in the afternoon, at what hour will he arrive?"

"Well, about three."

"And my own train leaves at four. Allow him a quarter of an hour to come from town and myself a quarter of an hour to get there (if he would give me his vehicle back). In that case I should have about half an hour to see him. We couldn't do much talk, but I could ask him the essential questions. I wish chiefly to ask him for some letters—letters of recommendation to some foreign scientists. He is the only man in this country who knows how much I know. It seems a pity to take two superfluous—that is, possibly superfluous—railway journeys, of an hour apiece; for I should probably come back with him. Don't you think so?" he asked, very frankly.

"You know best," said Adela. "I am not particularly fond of the journey to Slowfield, even when it's absolutely necessary."

"Yes; and then this is such a lovely day for a good long ramble in the fields. That's a thing I haven't had since I don't know when. I guess I'll remain." And he placed his hat on the floor beside him.

"I am afraid, now that I think of it," said Adela, "that there is no train until so late an hour that you would have very little time left on your arrival to talk with my brother, before the hour at which he himself might have determined to start for home. It's true that you might induce him to stop over till the evening."

"Dear me! I shouldn't want to do that. It might be very inconvenient for Mr. Moore, don't you



see? Besides, I shouldn't have time. And then I always like to see a man in his home—or at some place of my own; a man, that is, whom I have any regard for—and I have a very great regard for your brother, Miss Moore. When men meet at a half-way house neither feels at his ease. And then this is such an attractive country residence of yours," pursued Ludlow, looking about him.

"Yes, it's a very pretty place," said Adela.

Ludlow got up and walked to the window. "I want to look at your view," he remarked. "A lovely little spot. You are a happy woman, Miss Moore, to have the beauties of nature always before your eyes."

"Yes, if pretty scenery can make one happy, I ought to be happy." And Adela was glad to regain her feet and stand on the other side of the table, before the window.

"Don't you think it can?" asked Ludlow, turning round. "I don't know, though; perhaps it can't. Ugly sights can't make you unhappy, necessarily. I have been working for a year in one of the narrowest, darkest, dirtiest, busiest streets in New York, with rusty bricks and muddy gutters for scenery. But I think I can hardly set up to be miserable. I wish I could! It might be a claim on your benevolence." As he said these words he stood leaning against the window-shutter, outside the curtain, with folded arms. The morning light covered his face, and, mingled with that of his radiant laugh, showed Adela that his was a nature very much alive.

"Whatever else he may be," she said to herself, as she stood within the shade of the other curtain, playing with the paper-knife, which she had plucked from the table, "I think he is honest. I am afraid he isn't a gentleman—but he isn't a bore." She met his eye, freely, for a moment. "What do you want



of my benevolence ? ” she asked, with an abruptness of which she was perfectly conscious. “ Does he wish to make friends,” she pursued, tacitly, “ or does he merely wish to pay me a vulgar compliment ? There is bad taste, perhaps, in either case, but especially in the latter.” Meanwhile her visitor had already answered her.

“ What do I want of your benevolence ? Why, what does one want of any pleasant thing in life ? ”

“ Dear me, if you never have anything pleasanter than that ! ” our heroine exclaimed.

“ It will do very well for the present occasion,” said the young man, blushing, in a large masculine way, at his own quickness of repartee.

Adela glanced toward the clock on the chimney-piece. She was curious to measure the duration of her acquaintance with this breezy invader of her privacy, with whom she so suddenly found herself bandying jokes so personal. She had known him some eight minutes.

Ludlow observed her movement. “ I am interrupting you and detaining you from your own affairs,” he said ; and he moved toward his hat. “ I suppose I must bid you good-morning.” And he picked it up.

Adela stood at the table and watched him cross the room. To express a very delicate feeling in terms comparatively crude, she was loth to see him depart. She divined, too, that he was very sorry to go. The knowledge of this feeling on his side, however, affected her composure but slightly. The truth is—we say it with all respect—Adela was an old hand. She was modest, honest and wise ; but, as we have said, she had a past—a past of which importunate swains in the guise of morning-callers had been no inconsiderable part ; and a great dexterity in what may be called outflanking these gentlemen was one of her registered accomplishments. Her

liveliest emotion at present, therefore, was less one of annoyance at her companion than of surprise at her own mansuetude, which was yet undeniable. "Am I dreaming?" she asked herself. She looked out of the window, and then back at Ludlow, who stood grasping his hat and stick, contemplating her face. Should she give him leave to remain? "He is honest," she repeated; "why should not I be honest for once? I am sorry you are in a hurry," she said, aloud.

"I am in no hurry," he answered.

Adela turned her face to the window again, and toward the opposite hills. There was a moment's pause.

"I thought *you* were in a hurry," said Ludlow.

Adela shifted her eyes back to where they could see him. "My brother would be very glad that you should stay as long as you like. He would expect me to offer you what little hospitality is in my power."

"Pray, offer it then."

"That is very easily done. This is the parlour, and there, beyond the hall, is my brother's study. Perhaps you would like to look at his books and collections. I know nothing about them, and I should be a very poor guide. But you are welcome to go in and use your discretion in examining what may interest you."

"This, I take it, would be but another way of separating from you."

"For the present, yes."

"But I hesitate to take such liberties with your brother's things as you recommend."

"Recommend? I recommend nothing."

"But if I decline to penetrate into Mr. Moore's sanctum, what alternative remains?"

"Really - you must make your own alternative."

## A DAY OF DAYS

"I think you mentioned the parlour. Suppose I choose that."

"Just as you please. Here are some books, and if you like I will bring you some periodicals. There are ever so many scientific papers. Can I serve you in any other way? Are you tired by your walk? Would you like a glass of wine?"

"Tired by my walk?—not exactly. You are very kind, but I feel no immediate desire for a glass of wine. I think you needn't trouble yourself about the scientific periodicals either. I am not exactly in the mood to read." And Ludlow pulled out his watch and compared it with the clock. "I am afraid your clock is fast."

"Yes," said Adela; "very likely."

"Some ten minutes. Well, I suppose I had better be walking." And, coming toward Adela, he extended his hand.

She gave him hers. "It is a day of days for a long, slow ramble," she said.

Ludlow's only rejoinder was his hand-shake. He moved slowly toward the door, half accompanied by Adela. "Poor fellow!" she said to herself. There was a summer door, composed of lattices painted green, like a shutter; it admitted into the hall a cool, dusky light, in which Adela looked pale. Ludlow pushed its wings apart with his stick, and disclosed a landscape, long, deep, and bright, framed by the pillars of the porch. He stopped on the threshold, swinging his cane. "I hope I shall not lose my way," he said.

"I hope not. My brother will not forgive me if you do."

Ludlow's brows were slightly contracted by a frown, but he contrived to smile with his lips. "When shall I come back?" he asked, abruptly.

Adela found but a low tone—almost a whisper—

at her command to answer — "Whenever you please."

The young man turned round, with his back to the bright doorway, and looked into Adela's face, which was now covered with light. "Miss Moore," said he, "it's very much against my will that I leave you at all!"

Adela stood debating within herself. After all, what if her companion should stay with her? It would, under the circumstances, be an adventure; but was an adventure necessarily a criminal thing? It lay wholly with herself to decide. She was her own mistress, and she had hitherto been a just mistress. Might she not for once be a generous one? The reader will observe in Adela's meditation the recurrence of this saving clause "for once." It was produced by the simple fact that she had begun the day in a romantic mood. She was prepared to be interested; and now that an interesting phenomenon had presented itself, that it stood before her in vivid human—nay, manly—shape, instinct with reciprocity, was she to close her hand to the liberality of fate? To do so would be only to expose herself the more, for it would imply a gratuitous insult to human nature. Was not the man before her redolent of good intentions, and was that not enough? He was not what Adela had been used to call a gentleman; at this conviction she had arrived by a rapid diagonal, and now it served as a fresh starting-point. "I have seen all the gentlemen can show me" (this was her syllogism): "let us try something new! I see no reason why you should run away so fast, Mr. Ludlow," she said, aloud.

"I think it would be the greatest piece of folly I ever committed!" cried the young man.

"I think it would be rather a pity," Adela remarked.

"And you invite me into your parlour again? I come as *your* visitor, you know. I was your brother's before. It's a simple enough matter. We are old friends. We have a solid common ground in your brother. Isn't that about it?"

"You may adopt whatever theory you please. To my mind it is indeed a very simple matter."

"Oh, but I wouldn't have it too simple," said Ludlow, with a genial smile.

"Have it as you please!"

Ludlow leaned back against the doorway. "Look here, Miss Moore; your kindness makes me as gentle as a little child. I am passive; I am in your hands; do with me what you please. I can't help contrasting my fate with what it might have been but for you. A quarter of an hour ago I was ignorant of your existence; you were not in my programme. I had no idea your brother had a sister. When your servant spoke of 'Miss Moore,' upon my word I expected something rather elderly—something venerable—some rigid old lady, who would say, 'exactly,' and 'very well, sir,' and leave me to spend the rest of the morning tilting back in a chair on the piazza of the hotel. It shows what fools we are to attempt to forecast the future."

"We must not let our imagination run away with us in any direction," said Adela, sententiously.

"Imagination? I don't believe I have any. No, madam"—and Ludlow straightened himself up—"I live in the present. I write my programme from hour to hour—or, at any rate, I will in the future."

"I think you are very wise," said Adela. "Suppose you write a programme for the present hour. What shall we do? It seems to me a pity to spend so lovely a morning in-doors. There is something in the air—I can't imagine what—which seems to say it is the last day of summer. We ought to com-

memorate it. How should you like to take a walk ? ” Adela had decided that, to reconcile her aforesaid benevolence with the proper maintenance of her dignity, her only course was to be the perfect hostess. This decision made, very naturally and gracefully she played her part. It was the one possible part ; and yet it did not preclude those delicate sensations with which so rare an episode seemed charged : it simply legitimated them. A romantic adventure on so conventional a basis would assuredly hurt no one.

“ I should like a walk very much,” said Ludlow ; “ a walk with a halt at the end of it.”

“ Well, if you will consent to a short halt at the beginning of it,” Adela rejoined, “ I will be with you in a very few minutes.” When she returned, in her little hat and jacket, she found her friend seated on the steps of the verandah. He arose and gave her a card.

“ I have been requested, in your absence, to hand you this.”

Adela read with some compunction the name of Mr. Weatherby Pynsent.

“ Has he been here ? ” she asked. “ Why didn’t he come in ? ”

“ I told him you were not at home. If it wasn’t true then, it was going to be true so soon that the interval was hardly worth taking account of. He addressed himself to me, as I seemed from my position to be quite in possession ; that is, I put myself in his way, as it were, so that he had to speak to me : but I confess he looked at me as if he doubted my word. He hesitated as to whether he should confide his name to me, or whether he should ring for the servant. I think he wished to show me that he suspected my veracity, for he was making rather grimly for the door-bell when I, fearing that once inside the house he might encounter the living truth, informed him in the most good-humoured tone possible that I would



take charge of his little tribute, if he would trust me with it."

"It seems to me, Mr. Ludlow, that you are a strangely unscrupulous man. How did you know that Mr. Pynsent's business was not urgent?"

"I didn't know it! But I knew it could be no more urgent than mine. Depend upon it, Miss Moore, you have no case against me. I only pretend to be a man; to have admitted that sweet little cleric— isn't he a cleric, eh?—would have been the act of an angel."

Adela was familiar with a sequestered spot, in the very heart of the fields, as it seemed to her, to which she now proposed to conduct her friend. The point was to select a goal neither too distant nor too near, and to adopt a pace neither too rapid nor too slow. But, although Adela's happy valley was at least two miles away, and they had dawdled immensely over the interval, yet their arrival at a certain little rustic gate, beyond which the country grew vague and gently wild, struck Adela as sudden. Once on the road she felt a precipitate conviction that there could be no evil in an excursion so purely pastoral and no guile in a spirit so deeply sensitive to the influences of nature, and to the melancholy aspect of incipient autumn, as that of her companion. A man with an unaffected relish for small children is a man to inspire young women with a confidence; and so, in a less degree, a man with a genuine feeling for the unsophisticated beauties of a casual New England landscape may not unreasonably be regarded by the daughters of the scene as a person whose motives are pure. Adela was a great observer of the clouds, the trees, and the streams, the sounds and colours, the transparent airs and blue horizons of her adopted home; and she was reassured by Ludlow's appreciation of these modest phenomena. His enjoyment of



them, deep as it was, however, had to struggle against the sensuous depression natural to a man who has spent the summer looking over dry specimens in a laboratory, and against an impediment of a less material order—the feeling that Adela was a remarkably attractive woman. Still, naturally a great talker, he uttered his various satisfactions with abundant humour and point. Adela felt that he was decidedly a companion for the open air—he was a man to make use, even to abuse, of the wide horizon and the high ceiling of nature. The freedom of his gestures, the sonority of his voice, the keenness of his vision, the general vivacity of his manners, seemed to necessitate and to justify a universal absence of resisting surfaces. They passed through the little gate and wandered over empty pastures, until the ground began to rise, and stony surfaces to crop through the turf; when, after a short ascent, they reached a broad plateau, covered with boulders and shrubs, which lost itself on one side in a short, steep cliff, whence fields and marshes stretched down to the opposite river, and on the other, in scattered clumps of cedar and maple, which gradually thickened and multiplied, until the horizon in that quarter was purple with mild masses of forest. Here was both sun and shade—the unobstructed sky, or the whispering dome of a circle of trees which had always reminded Adela of the stone-pines of the Villa Borghese. Adela led the way to a sunny seat among the rocks which commanded the course of the river, where the murmuring cedars would give them a kind of human company.

“It has always seemed to me that the wind in the trees is always the voice of coming changes,” Ludlow said.

“Perhaps it is,” Adela replied. “The trees are for ever talking in this melancholy way, and men are for ever changing.”

"Yes, but they can only be said to express the foreboding of coming events—that is what I mean—when there is some one there to hear them; and more especially some one in whose life a change is, to his knowledge, about to take place. Then they are quite prophetic. Don't you know Longfellow says so?"

"Yes, I know Longfellow says so. But you seem to speak from your own inspiration."

"Well, I rather think I do."

"Is there some great change hanging over you?"

"Yes, rather an important one."

"I believe that's what men say when they are going to be married," said Adela.

"I am going to be divorced, rather. I am going to Europe."

"Indeed! soon?"

"To-morrow," said Ludlow, after an instant's pause.

"Oh!" exclaimed Adela. "How I envy you!"

Ludlow, who sat looking over the cliff and tossing stones down into the plain, observed a certain inequality in the tone of his companion's two exclamations. The first was nature, the second art. He turned his eyes upon her, but she had directed hers away into the distance. Then, for a moment, he retreated within himself and thought. He rapidly surveyed his position. Here was he, Tom Ludlow, a hard-headed son of toil; without fortune, without credit, without antecedents, whose lot was cast exclusively with vulgar males, and who had never had a mother, a sister, nor a well-bred sweetheart, to pitch his voice for the feminine tympanum, who had seldom come nearer an indubitable lady than, in a favouring crowd, to receive a mechanical "thank you" (as if he were a policeman) for some accidental assistance: here he found himself up to his neck in

a sudden pastoral with a young woman who was evidently altogether superior. That it was in him to enjoy the society of such a person (provided, of course, she were not a chit) he very well knew ; but he had never happened to suppose that he should find it open to him. Was he now to infer that this brilliant gift was his—the gift of what is called in the relation between the sexes success ? The inference was at least logical. He had made a good impression. Why else should an eminently discriminating girl have fraternised with him at such a rate ? It was with a little thrill of satisfaction that Ludlow reflected upon the directness of his course. “ It all comes back to my old theory that a process can’t be too simple. I used no arts. In such an enterprise I shouldn’t have known where to begin. It was my ignorance of the regular way that saved me. Women like a gentleman, of course ; but they like a man better.” It was the little touch of nature he had detected in Adela’s tone that set him thinking ; but as compared with the frankness of his own attitude it betrayed after all no undue emotion. Ludlow had accepted the fact of his adaptability to the idle mood of a cultivated woman in a thoroughly rational spirit, and he was not now tempted to exaggerate its bearings. He was not the man to be intoxicated by a triumph after all possibly superficial. “ If Miss Moore is so wise—or so foolish—as to like me half an hour for what I am, she is welcome,” he said to himself. “ Assuredly,” he added, as he glanced at her intelligent profile, “ she will not like me for what I am not.” It needs a woman, however, far more intelligent than (thank heaven !) most women are—more intelligent, certainly, than Adela was—to guard her happiness against a clever man’s consistent assumption of her intelligence ; and doubtless it was from a sense of this general truth that, as Ludlow continued to observe

his companion, he felt an emotion of manly tenderness. "I wouldn't offend her for the world," he thought. Just then Adela, conscious of his contemplation, looked about; and before he knew it, Ludlow had repeated aloud, "Miss Moore, I wouldn't offend you for the world."

Adela eyed him for a moment with a little flush that subsided into a smile. "To what dreadful impertinence is that the prelude?" she inquired.

"It's the prelude to nothing. It refers to the past—to any possible displeasure I may have caused you."

"Your scruples are unnecessary, Mr. Ludlow. If you had given me offence, I should not have left you to apologise for it. I should not have left the matter to occur to you as you sat dreaming charitably in the sun."

"What would you have done?"

"Done? nothing. You don't imagine I would have scolded you—or snubbed you—or answered you back, I take it. I would have left undone—what, I can't tell you. Ask yourself what I *have* done. I am sure I hardly know myself," said Adela, with some intensity. "At all events, here I am sitting with you in the fields, as if you were a friend of many years. Why do you speak of offence?" And Adela (an uncommon accident with her) lost command of her voice, which trembled ever so slightly. "What an odd thought! why should you offend me? Do I seem so open to that sort of thing?" Her colour had deepened again, and her eyes had brightened. She had forgotten herself, and before speaking had not, as was her wont, sought counsel of that staunch conservative, her taste. She had spoken from a full heart—a heart which had been filling rapidly, since the outset of their walk, with a feeling almost passionate in its quality, and which that little puff of the actual conveyed in Mr. Ludlow's announcement

of his departure had caused to overflow. The reader may give this feeling whatever name he chooses. We will content ourselves with saying that Adela had played with fire so effectually that she had been scorched. The slight violence of the speech just quoted may represent her sensation of pain.

"You pull one up rather short, Miss Moore," said Ludlow. "A man says the best he can."

Adela made no reply—for a moment she hung her head. Was she to cry out because she was hurt? Was she to thrust her injured heart into a company in which there was, as yet at least, no question of hearts? No! here our reserved and contemplative heroine is herself again. Her part was still to be the youthful woman of the world, the perfect young lady. For our own part, we can imagine no figure more engaging than this civilised and disciplined personage under such circumstances; and if Adela had been the most accomplished of coquettes she could not have assumed a more becoming expression than the air of judicious consideration which now covered her features. But having paid this generous homage to propriety, she felt free to suffer in secret. Raising her eyes from the ground, she abruptly addressed her companion.

"By the way, Mr. Ludlow, tell me something about yourself."

Ludlow burst into a laugh. "What shall I tell you?"

"Everything."

"Everything? Excuse me, I'm not such a fool. But do you know that's a very tempting request you make? I suppose I ought to blush and hesitate; but I never yet blushed or hesitated in the right place."

"Very good. There is one fact. Continue. Begin at the beginning."

## A DAY OF DAYS

"Well, let me see. My name you know. I am twenty-eight years old."

"That's the end," said Adela.

"But you don't want the history of my babyhood, I take it. I imagine that I was a very big, noisy, ugly baby—what's called a 'splendid infant.' My parents were poor, and, of course, honest. They belonged to a very different set—or 'sphere,' I suppose you call it—from any you probably know. They were working people. My father was a chemist, in a small way of business, and I suspect my mother was not above using her hands to turn a penny. But although I don't remember her, I am sure she was a good, sound woman; I feel her occasionally in my own sinews. I myself have been at work all my life, and a very good worker I am, let me tell you. I am not patient, as I imagine your brother to be—although I have more patience than you might suppose—but I don't let go easily. If I strike you as very egotistical, remember 'twas you began it. I don't know whether I am clever, and I don't much care; that's a kind of metaphysical, sentimental, vapid word. But I know what I want to know, and I generally manage to find it out. I don't know much about my moral nature; I have no doubt I am beastly selfish. Still, I don't like to hurt people's feelings, and I am rather fond of poetry and flowers. I don't believe I am very 'high-toned,' all the same. I should not be at all surprised to discover I was prodigiously conceited; but I am afraid the discovery wouldn't cut me down much. I am remarkably hard to keep down, I know. Oh, you would think me a great brute if you knew me. I shouldn't recommend any one to count too much on my being of an amiable disposition. I am often very much bored with people who are fond of me—because some of them are, really; so I am afraid I am ungrateful. Of course,



as a man speaking to a woman, there's nothing for it but to say I am very low ; but I hate to talk about things you can't prove. I have got very little 'general culture,' you know, but first and last I have read a great many books—and, thank heaven, I remember things. And I have some tastes, too. I am very fond of music. I have a good young voice of my own ; *that* I can't help knowing ; and I am not one to be bullied about pictures. I know how to sit on a horse, and how to row a boat. Is that enough ? I am conscious of a great inability to say anything to the point. To put myself in a nutshell, I am a greedy specialist—and not a bad fellow. Still, I am only what I am—a very common creature."

"Do you call yourself a very common creature because you really believe yourself to be one, or because you are weakly tempted to disfigure your rather flattering catalogue with a great final blot ?"

"I am sure I don't know. You show more subtlety in that one question than I have shown in a whole string of affirmations. You women are strong on asking embarrassing questions. Seriously, I believe I *am* second-rate. I wouldn't make such an admission to every one though. But to you, Miss Moore, who sit there under your parasol as impartial as the muse of history, to you I owe the truth. I am no man of genius. There is something I miss ; some final distinction I lack ; you may call it what you please. Perhaps it's humility. Perhaps you can find it in Ruskin, somewhere. Perhaps it's delicacy—perhaps it's imagination. I am very vulgar, Miss Moore. I am the vulgar son of vulgar people. I use the word, of course, in its literal sense. So much I grant you at the outset, but it's my last concession !"

"Your concessions are smaller than they sound. Have you any sisters ?"



"Not a sister ; and no brothers, nor cousins, nor uncles, nor aunts."

"And you sail for Europe to-morrow ? "

"To-morrow, at ten o'clock."

"To be away how long ? "

"As long as I can. Five years, if possible."

"What do you expect to do in those five years ? "

"Well, study."

"Nothing but study ? "

"It will all come back to that, I guess. I hope to enjoy myself considerably, and to look at the world as I go. But I must not waste time ; I am growing old."

"Where are you going ? "

"To Berlin. I wanted to get some letters of introduction from your brother."

"Have you money ? Are you well off ? "

"Well off ? Not I, heaven forgive me ! I am very poor. I have in hand a little money that has just come to me from an unexpected quarter : an old debt owing my father. It will take me to Germany and keep me for six months. After that I shall work my way."

"Are you happy ? Are you contented ? "

"Just now I am pretty comfortable, thank you."

"But shall you be so when you get to Berlin ? "

"I don't promise to be contented ; but I am pretty sure to be happy."

"Well," said Adela, "I sincerely hope you will succeed in everything."

"Thank you, awfully," said Ludlow.

Of what more was said at this moment no record may be given here. The reader has been put into possession of the key of our friends' conversation ; it is only needful to say that in this key it was prolonged for half an hour more. As the minutes elapsed Adela found herself drifting further and further away from her anchorage. When at last she com-

pelled herself to consult her watch and remind her companion that there remained but just time enough for them to reach home in anticipation of her brother's arrival, she knew that she was rapidly floating seaward. As she descended the hill at her companion's side she felt herself suddenly thrilled by an acute temptation. Her first instinct was to close her eyes upon it, in the trust that when she should open them again it would have vanished ; but she found that it was not to be so uncompromisingly dismissed. It pressed her so hard that before she walked a mile homeward she had succumbed to it, or had at least given it the pledge of that quickening of the heart which accompanies a bold resolution. This little sacrifice allowed her no breath for idle words, and she accordingly advanced with a bent and listening head. Ludlow marched along, with no apparent diminution of his habitual buoyancy of mien, talking as fast and as loud as at the outset. He risked a prophecy that Mr. Moore would not have returned, and charged Adela with a comical message of regrets. Adela had begun by wondering whether the approach of their separation had wrought within him any sentimental depression at all commensurate with her own, with that which sealed her lips and weighed upon her heart ; and now she was debating as to whether his express declaration that he felt " awfully blue " ought necessarily to remove her doubts. Ludlow followed up this declaration with a very pretty review of the morning, and a leave-taking speech which, whether intensely sincere or not, struck Adela as at least in very good taste. He might be a common creature—but he was certainly a very uncommon one. When they reached the garden-gate it was with a fluttering heart that Adela scanned the premises for some accidental sign of her brother's presence. She felt that there would be an especial

fitness in his not having returned. She led the way in. The hall table was bare of his usual hat and overcoat, his silver-headed stick was not in the corner. The only object that struck her was Mr. Pynsent's card, which she had deposited there on her exit. All that was represented by that little white ticket seemed a thousand miles away. She looked for Mr. Moore in his study, but it was empty.

As Adela went back from her quest into the drawing-room she simply shook her head at Ludlow, who was standing before the fireplace; and as she did so she caught her reflexion in the mantel-glass. "Verily," she said to herself, "I have travelled far." She had pretty well unlearned her old dignities and forms, but she was to break with them still more completely. It was with a singular hardihood that she prepared to redeem the little pledge which had been extorted from her on her way home. She felt that there was no trial to which her generosity might now be called which she would not hail with enthusiasm. Unfortunately, her generosity was not likely to be challenged; although she nevertheless had the satisfaction of assuring herself at this moment that, like the mercy of the Lord, it was infinite. Should she satisfy herself of her friend's? or should she leave it delightfully uncertain? These had been the terms of what has been called her temptation, at the foot of the hill.

"Well, I have very little time," said Ludlow; "I must get my dinner and pay my bill and drive to the train." And he put out his hand.

Adela gave him her own, without meeting his eyes. "You are in a great hurry," she said, rather casually.

"It's not I who am in a hurry. It's my confounded destiny. It's the train and the steamer."

"If you really wished to stay you wouldn't be bullied by the train and the steamer."

"Very true—very true. But *do* I really wish to stay?"

"That's the question. That's exactly what I want to know."

"You ask difficult questions, Miss Moore."

"Difficult for me—yes."

"Then, of course, you are prepared to answer easy ones."

"Let me hear what you call easy."

"Well then, do you wish me to stay? All I have to do is to throw down my hat, sit down, and fold my arms for twenty minutes. I lose my train and my ship. I remain in America, instead of going to Europe."

"I have thought of all that."

"I don't mean to say it's a great deal. There are attractions on both sides."

"Yes, and especially on one. It *is* a great deal."

"And you request me to give it up—to renounce Berlin?"

"No; I ought not to do that. What I ask of you is whether, if I *should* so request you, you would say 'yes.'"

"That *does* make the matter easy for you, Miss Moore. What attractions do you hold out?"

"I hold out nothing whatever, sir."

"I suppose that means a great deal."

"A great deal of absurdity."

"Well, you are certainly a most interesting woman, Miss Moore—a charming woman."

"Why don't you call me irresistible at once, and bid me good morning?"

"I don't know but that I shall have to come to that. But I will give you no answer that leaves you at an advantage. Ask me to stay—order me to stay, if that suits you better—and I will see how it sounds. Come, you must not trifle with a man."

He still held Adela's hand, and now they were looking watchfully into each other's eyes. He paused, waiting for an answer.

"Good-bye, Mr. Ludlow," said Adela. "God bless you!" And she was about to withdraw her hand; but he held it.

"Are we friends?" said he.

Adela gave a little shrug of her shoulders. "Friends of three hours!"

Ludlow looked at her with some sternness. "Our parting could at best hardly have been sweet," said he; "but why should you make it bitter, Miss Moore?"

"If it's bitter, why should you try to change it?"

"Because I don't like bitter things."

Ludlow had caught a glimpse of the truth—that truth of which the reader has had a glimpse—and he stood there at once thrilled and annoyed. He had both a heart and a conscience. "It's not my fault," he murmured to the latter; but he was unable to add, in all consistency, that it was his misfortune. It would be very heroic, very poetic, very chivalric, to lose his steamer, and he felt that he could do so for sufficient cause—at the suggestion of a fact. But the motive here was less than a fact—an idea; less than an idea—a mere guess. "It's a very pretty little romance as it is," he said to himself. "Why spoil it? She's a different sort from any I have met, and just to have seen her like this—that is enough for me!" He raised her hand to his lips, pressed them to it, dropped it, reached the door, and bounded out of the garden-gate.



## A LIGHT MAN





And I—what I seem to my friend, you see—  
What I soon shall seem to his love, you guess.  
What I seem to myself, do you ask of me?  
No hero, I confess.

“A Light Woman.”  
BROWNING'S *Men and Women*.

APRIL 4, 1857.—I have changed my sky without changing my mind. I resume these old notes in a new world. I hardly know of what use they are; but it's easier to stick to the habit than to drop it. I have been at home now a week—at home, forsooth! And yet, after all, it *is* home. I am dejected, I am bored, I am blue. How can a man be more at home than that? Nevertheless, I am the citizen of a great country, and for that matter, of a great city. I walked to-day some ten miles or so along Broadway, and, on the whole, I don't blush for my native land. We are a capable race and a good-looking withal; and I don't see why we shouldn't prosper as well as another. This, by the way, ought to be a very encouraging reflexion. A capable fellow and a good-looking withal; I don't see why he shouldn't die a millionaire. At all events he must do something. When a man has, at thirty-two, a net income of considerably less than nothing, he can scarcely hope to overtake a fortune before he himself is overtaken by age and philosophy—two deplorable impediments. I am afraid that one of them has already planted itself in my path. What am I? What do I wish?

Whither do I tend? What do I believe? I am constantly beset by these impertinent whisperings. Formerly it was enough that I was Maximus Austin; that I was endowed with a cheerful mind and a good digestion; that one day or another, when I had come to the end, I should return to America and begin at the beginning; that, meanwhile, existence was sweet in—in the Rue Tronchet. But now! Has the sweetness really passed out of life? Have I eaten the plums and left nothing but the bread and milk and corn-starch, or whatever the horrible concoction is?—I had it to-day for dinner. Pleasure, at least, I imagine—pleasure pure and simple, pleasure crude, brutal, and vulgar—this poor flimsy delusion has lost all its charm. I shall never again care for certain things—nor indeed for certain persons. Of such things, of such persons, I firmly maintain, however, that I never was an enthusiastic votary. It would be more to my credit, I suppose, if I had been. More would be forgiven me if I had loved a little more, if into all my folly and egotism I had put a little more *naïveté* and sincerity. Well, I did the best I could; I was at once too bad and too good for it all. At present, it's far enough off; I have put the sea between us; I am stranded. I sit high and dry, scanning the horizon for a friendly sail, or waiting for a high tide to set me afloat. The wave of pleasure has deposited me here in the sand. Shall I owe my rescue to the wave of pain? At moments I feel a kind of longing to expiate my stupid little sins. I see, as through a glass, darkly, the beauty of labour and love. Decidedly, I am willing to work. It's written.

7th.—My sail is in sight; it's at hand; I have all but boarded the vessel. I received this morning a letter from the best man in the world. Here it is:—

## A LIGHT MAN

DEAR MAX—I see this very moment, in an old newspaper which had already passed through my hands without yielding up its most precious item, the announcement of your arrival in New York. To think of your having perhaps missed the welcome you had a right to expect from me! Here it is, dear Max—as cordial as you please. When I say I have just read of your arrival, I mean that twenty minutes have elapsed by the clock. These have been spent in conversation with my excellent friend, Mr. Sloane—we having taken the liberty of making you the topic. I haven't time to say more about Frederick Sloane than that he is very anxious to make your acquaintance, and that, if your time is not otherwise engaged, he would like you very much to spend a month with him. He is an excellent host, or I shouldn't be here myself. It appears that he knew your mother very intimately, and he has a taste for visiting the amenities of the parents upon the children; the original ground of my own connexion with him was that he had been a particular friend of my father. You may have heard your mother speak of him. He is a very strange old fellow, but you will like him. Whether or no you come for his sake, come for mine.—Yours always,

THEODORE LISLE.

Theodore's letter is of course very kind, but it's remarkably obscure. My mother may have had the highest regard for Mr. Sloane, but she never mentioned his name in my hearing. Who is he, what is he, and what is the nature of his relations with Theodore? I shall learn betimes. I have written to Theodore that I gladly accept (I believe I suppressed the "gladly" though) his friend's invitation, and that I shall immediately present myself. What can I do that is better? Speaking sordidly, I shall obtain food and lodging while I look about me. I shall have a base of operations. D——, it appears, is a long day's journey, but enchanting when you reach it. I am curious to see an enchanting American

town. And to stay a month ! Mr. Frederick Sloane, whoever you are, *vous faites bien les choses*, and the little that I know of you is very much to your credit. You enjoyed the friendship of my dear mother, you possess the esteem of the virtuous Theodore, you commend yourself to my own affection. At this rate I shall not grudge it.

D—, 14<sup>th</sup>.—I have been here since Thursday evening—three days. As we rattled up to the tavern in the village I perceived from the top of the coach, in the twilight, Theodore beneath the porch, scanning the vehicle, with all his amiable disposition in his eyes. He has grown older, of course, in these five years, but less so than I had expected. His is one of those smooth, unwrinkled souls that keep their bodies fair and fresh. As tall as ever, moreover, and as lean and clean. How short and fat and dark and debauched he makes one feel ! By nothing he says or means, of course, but merely by his old unconscious purity and simplicity— that slender straightness which makes him remind you of the spire of an English abbey. He greeted me with smiles, and stares, and alarming blushes. He assures me that he never would have known me, and that five years have altered me —*schr !* I asked him if it were for the better ? He looked at me hard for a moment, with his eyes of blue, and then, for an answer, he blushed again.

On my arrival we agreed to walk over from the village. He dismissed his waggon with my luggage, and we went arm-in-arm through the dusk. The town is seated at the foot of certain mountains, whose names I have yet to learn, and at the head of a big sheet of water, which, as yet, too, I know only as "the Lake." The road hitherward soon leaves the village and wanders in rural loveliness by the margin of this expanse. Sometimes the water is hidden by clumps of trees, behind which we heard it

lapping and gurgling in the darkness ; sometimes it stretches out from your feet in shining vagueness, as if it were tired of making all day a million little eyes at the great stupid hills. The walk from the tavern takes some half an hour, and in this interval Theodore made his position a little more clear. Mr. Sloane is a rich old widower ; his age is seventy-two, and, as his health is thoroughly broken, is practically even greater ; and his fortune—Theodore, characteristically, doesn't know anything definite about that. It's probably about a million. He has lived much in Europe and in the "great world" ; he has had adventures and passions and all that sort of thing ; and now, in the evening of his days, like an old French diplomatist, he takes it into his head to write his memoirs. To this end he has lured poor Theodore to his gruesome side, to mend his pens for him. He has been a great scribbler, says Theodore, all his days, and he proposes to incorporate a large amount of promiscuous literary matter into these *souvenirs intimes*. Theodore's principal function seems to be to get him to leave things out. In fact the poor youth seems troubled in conscience. His patron's lucubrations have taken the turn of many other memoirs, and have ceased to address themselves *virginibus puerisque*. On the whole, he declares they are a very odd mixture—a medley of gold and tinsel, of bad taste and good sense. I can readily understand it. The old man bores me, puzzles me, and amuses me.

He was in waiting to receive me. We found him in his library—which, by the way, is simply the most delightful apartment that I ever smoked a cigar in—a room arranged for a lifetime. At one end stands a great fireplace, with a florid, fantastic mantelpiece in carved white marble—an importation, of course, and, as one may say, an interpolation ; the groundwork of the house, the "fixtures," being throughout plain,

solid, and domestic. Over the mantel-shelf is a large landscape, a fine Gainsborough, full of the complicated harmonies of an English summer. Beneath it stands a row of bronzes of the Renaissance and potteries of the Orient. Facing the door, as you enter, is an immense window, set in a recess, with cushioned seats and large clear panes, stationed, as it were, at the very apex of the lake (which forms an almost perfect oval) and commanding a view of its whole extent. At the other end, opposite the fireplace, the wall is studded from floor to ceiling with choice foreign paintings, placed in relief against the orthodox crimson screen. Elsewhere the place is covered with books, arranged neither in formal regularity nor quite helter-skelter, but in a sort of genial incongruity, which tells that sooner or later each volume feels sure of leaving the ranks and returning into different company. Mr. Sloane makes use of his books. His two passions, according to Theodore, are reading and talking ; but to talk he must have a book in his hand. The charm of the room lies in the absence of certain pedantic tones—the browns, blacks, and greys—which distinguish most libraries. The apartment is of the feminine gender. There are half-a-dozen light colours scattered about—pink in the carpet, tender blue in the curtains, yellow in the chairs. The result is a general look of brightness and lightness ; it expresses even a certain cynicism. You perceive the place to be the home, not of a man of learning, but of a man of fancy.

He rose from his chair—the man of fancy, to greet me—the man of fact. As I looked at him, in the lamplight, it seemed to me for the first five minutes that I had seldom seen an uglier little person. It took me five minutes to get the point of view ; then I began to admire. He is diminutive, or, at best, of my own moderate stature, and bent and contracted



with his seventy years ; lean and delicate, moreover, and very highly finished. He is curiously pale, with a kind of opaque yellow pallor. Literally, it's a magnificent yellow. His skin is of just the hue and apparent texture of some old crumpled Oriental scroll. I know a dozen painters who would give more than they have to arrive at the exact " tone " of his thick-veined, bloodless hands, his polished ivory knuckles. His eyes are circled with red, but in the battered little setting of their orbits they have the lustre of old sapphires. His nose, owing to the falling away of other portions of his face, has assumed a grotesque, unnatural prominence ; it describes an immense arch, gleaming like a piece of parchment stretched on ivory. He has, apparently, all his teeth, but has swathed his cranium in a dead black wig ; of course he's clean shaven. In his dress he has a muffled, wadded look and an apparent aversion to linen, inasmuch as none is visible on his person. He seems neat enough, but not fastidious. At first, as I say, I fancied him monstrously ugly ; but, on further acquaintance, I perceived that what I had taken for ugliness is nothing but the incomplete remains of remarkable good looks. The line of his features is pure ; his nose, *cæteris paribus*, would be extremely handsome ; his eyes are the oldest eyes I ever saw, and yet they are wonderfully living. He has something remarkably insinuating.

He offered his two hands as Theodore introduced me ; I gave him my own, and he stood smiling at me like some quaint old image in ivory and ebony, scanning my face with a curiosity which he took no pains to conceal. " God bless me," he said at last, " how much you look like your father ! " I sat down, and for half an hour we talked of many things—of my journey, of my impressions of America, of my reminiscences of Europe, and, by implication, of my prospects. His voice is weak and cracked, but he

makes it express everything. Mr. Sloane is not yet in his dotage—oh no! He nevertheless makes himself out a poor creature. In reply to an inquiry of mine about his health, he favoured me with a long list of his infirmities (some of which are very trying, certainly) and assured me that he was quite finished.

“I live out of mere curiosity,” he said.

“I have heard of people dying from the same motive.”

He looked at me a moment, as if to ascertain whether I were laughing at him. And then, after a pause, “Perhaps you don’t know that I disbelieve in a future life,” he remarked, blandly.

At these words Theodore got up and walked to the fire.

“Well, we shan’t quarrel about that,” said I. Theodore turned round, staring.

“Do you mean that you agree with me?” the old man asked.

“I certainly haven’t come here to talk theology! Don’t ask me to disbelieve, and I’ll never ask you to believe.”

“Come,” cried Mr. Sloane, rubbing his hands, “you’ll not persuade me you are a Christian—like your friend Theodore there.”

“Like Theodore—assuredly not.” And then, somehow, I don’t know why, at the thought of Theodore’s Christianity I burst into a laugh. “Excuse me, my dear fellow,” I said, “you know, for the last ten years I have lived in pagan lands.”

“What do you call pagan?” asked Theodore, smiling.

I saw the old man with his hands locked, eyeing me shrewdly, and waiting for my answer. I hesitated a moment, and then I said, “Everything that makes life tolerable!”

Hereupon Mr. Sloane began to laugh till he coughed.

Verily, I thought, if he lives for curiosity, he's easily satisfied.

We went in to dinner, and this repast showed me that some of his curiosity is culinary. I observed, by the way, that for a victim of neuralgia, dyspepsia, and a thousand other ills, Mr. Sloane plies a most inconsequent knife and fork. Sauces and spices and condiments seem to be the chief of his diet. After dinner he dismissed us, in consideration of my natural desire to see my friend in private. Theodore has capital quarters—a downy bedroom and a snug little *salon*. We talked till near midnight—of ourselves, of each other, and of the author of the memoirs, downstairs. That is, I spoke of myself, and Theodore listened; and then Theodore descanted upon Mr. Sloane, and I listened. His commerce with the old man has sharpened his wits. Sloane has taught him to observe and judge, and Theodore turns round, observes, judges—him! He has become quite the critic and analyst. There is something very pleasant in the discriminations of a conscientious mind, in which criticism is tempered by an angelic charity. Only, it may easily end by acting on one's nerves. At midnight we repaired to the library, to take leave of our host till the morrow—an attention which, under all circumstances, he rigidly exacts. As I gave him my hand he held it again and looked at me as he had done on my arrival. “Bless my soul,” he said at last, “how much you look like your mother!”

To-night, at the end of my third day, I begin to feel decidedly at home. The fact is, I am remarkably comfortable. The house is pervaded by an indefinable, irresistible air of luxury and privacy. Mr. Frederick Sloane is a horribly corrupt old mortal. Already, in his relaxing presence, I have become heartily reconciled to doing nothing. But with Theodore on one side—standing there like a tall

interrogation-point—I honestly believe I can defy Mr. Sloane on the other. The former asked me this morning, with visible solicitude, in allusion to the bit of dialogue I have quoted above on matters of faith, whether I am really a materialist—whether I don't believe something? I told him I would believe anything he liked. He looked at me a while, in friendly sadness. "I hardly know whether you are not worse than Mr. Sloane," he said.

But Theodore is, after all, in duty bound to give a man a long rope in these matters. His own rope is one of the longest. He reads Voltaire with Mr. Sloane, and Emerson in his own room. He is the stronger man of the two; he has the larger stomach. Mr. Sloane delights, of course, in Voltaire, but he can't read a line of Emerson. Theodore delights in Emerson, and enjoys Voltaire, though he thinks him superficial. It appears that since we parted in Paris, five years ago, his conscience has dwelt in many lands. *C'est toute une histoire*—which he tells very prettily. He left college determined to enter the church, and came abroad with his mind full of theology and Tübingen. He appears to have studied, not wisely, but too well. Instead of faith full-armed and serene, there sprang from the labour of his brain a myriad sickly questions, piping for answers. He went for a winter to Italy, where, I take it, he was not quite so much afflicted as he ought to have been at the sight of the beautiful spiritual repose that he had missed. It was after this that we spent those three months together in Brittany—the best-spent months of my long residence in Europe. Theodore inoculated me, I think, with some of his seriousness, and I just touched him with my profanity; and we agreed together that there were a few good things left—health, friendship, a summer sky, and the lovely byways of an old French province. He came home,

searched the Scriptures once more, accepted a "call," and made an attempt to respond to it. But the inner voice failed him. His outlook was cheerless enough. During his absence his married sister, the older one, had taken the other to live with her, relieving Theodore of the charge of contribution to her support. But suddenly, behold the husband, the brother-in-law, dies, leaving a mere figment of property ; and the two ladies, with their two little girls, are afloat in the wide world. Theodore finds himself at twenty-six without an income, without a profession, and with a family of four females to support. Well, in his quiet way he draws on his courage. The history of the two years that passed before he came to Mr. Sloane is really absolutely edifying. He rescued his sisters and nieces from the deep waters, placed them high and dry, established them somewhere in decent gentility—and then found at last that his strength had left him—had dropped dead, like an over-ridden horse. In short, he had worked himself to the bone. It was now his sisters' turn. They nursed him with all the added tenderness of gratitude for the past and terror of the future, and brought him safely through a grievous malady. Meanwhile Mr. Sloane, having decided to treat himself to a private secretary and suffered dreadful mischance in three successive experiments, had heard of Theodore's situation and his merits ; had furthermore recognised in him the son of an early and intimate friend, and had finally offered him the very comfortable position he now occupies. There is a decided incongruity between Theodore as a man—as Theodore, in fine—and the dear fellow as the intellectual agent, confidant, complaisant, purveyor, pander—what you will—of a battered old cynic and dilettante—a worldling if there ever was one. There seems at first sight a perfect want of agreement

between his character and his function. One is gold and the other brass, or something very like it. But, on reflexion, I can enter into it—his having, under the circumstances, accepted Mr. Sloane's offer and been content to do his duties. *Ce que c'est que de nous !* Theodore's contentment in such a case is a theme for the moralist—a better moralist than I. The best and purest mortals are an odd mixture, and in none of us does honesty exist on its own terms. Ideally, Theodore hasn't the smallest business *dans cette galère*. It offends my sense of propriety to find him here. I feel that I ought to notify him, as a friend, that he has knocked at the wrong door, and that he had better retreat before he is brought to the blush. However, I suppose he might as well be here as reading Emerson, "evenings," in the back parlour, to those two very ugly sisters—judging from their photographs. Practically it hurts no one not to be too much of a prig. Poor Theodore was weak, depressed, out of work. Mr. Sloane offers him a lodging and a salary in return for—after all, merely a little tact. All he has to do is to read to the old man, lay down the book a while, with his finger in the place, and let him talk ; take it up again, read another dozen pages and submit to another commentary. Then to write a dozen pages under his dictation—to suggest a word, polish off a period, or help him out with a complicated idea or a half-remembered fact. This is all, I say ; and yet this is much. Theodore's apparent success proves it to be much, as well as the old man's satisfaction. It is a part ; he has to simulate. He has to "make believe" a little—a good deal ; he has to put his pride in his pocket and send his conscience to the wash. He has to be accommodating—to listen and pretend and flatter ; and he does it as well as many a worse man—does it far better than I. I might bully the old man, but



I don't think I could humour him. After all, however, it is not a matter of comparative merit. In every son of woman there are two men—the practical man and the dreamer. We live for our dreams—but, meanwhile, we live by our wits. When the dreamer is a poet, the other fellow is an artist. Theodore, at bottom, is only a man of taste. If he were not destined to become a high priest among moralists, he might be a prince among connoisseurs. He plays his part, therefore, artistically, with spirit, with originality, with all his native refinement. How can Mr. Sloane fail to believe that he possesses a paragon? He is no such fool as not to appreciate a *nature distinguée* when it comes in his way. He confidentially assured me this morning that Theodore has the most charming mind in the world, but that it's a pity he's so simple as not to suspect it. If he only doesn't ruin him with his flattery!

19th.—I am certainly fortunate among men. This morning when, tentatively, I spoke of going away, Mr. Sloane rose from his seat in horror and declared that for the present I must regard his house as my home. "Come, come," he said, "when you leave this place where do you intend to go?" Where, indeed? I graciously allowed Mr. Sloane to have the best of the argument. Theodore assures me that he appreciates these and other affabilities, and that I have made what he calls a "conquest" of his venerable heart. Poor, battered, bamboozled old organ! he would have one believe that it has a most tragical record of capture and recapture. At all events, it appears that I am master of the citadel. For the present I have no wish to evacuate. I feel, nevertheless, in some far-off corner of my soul, that I ought to shoulder my victorious banner and advance to more fruitful triumphs.

I blush for my beastly laziness. It isn't that I



am willing to stay here a month, but that I am willing to stay here six. Such is the charming, disgusting truth. Have I really outlived the age of energy? Have I survived my ambition, my integrity, my self-respect? Verily, I ought to have survived the habit of asking myself silly questions. I made up my mind long ago to go in for nothing but present success, and I don't care for that sufficiently to secure it at the cost of temporary suffering. I have a passion for nothing—not even for life. I know very well the appearance I make in the world. I pass for a clever, accomplished, capable, good-natured fellow, who can do anything if he would only try. I am supposed to be rather cultivated, to have latent talents. When I was younger I used to find a certain entertainment in the spectacle of human affairs. I liked to see men and women hurrying on each other's heels across the stage. But I am sick and tired of them now; not that I am a misanthrope, God forbid! They are not worth hating. I never knew but one creature who was, and her I went and loved. To be consistent, I ought to have hated my mother, and now I ought to detest Theodore. But I don't—truly, on the whole, I don't—any more than I dote on him. I firmly believe that it makes a difference to him, his idea that I *am* fond of him. He believes in that, as he believes in all the rest of it—in my culture, my latent talents, my underlying “earnestness,” my sense of beauty and love of truth. Oh, for a *man* among them all—a fellow with eyes in his head—eyes that would know me for what I am and let me see they had guessed it! Possibly such a fellow as that might get a “rise” out of me.

In the name of bread and butter, what am I to do? (I was obliged this morning to borrow fifty dollars from Theodore, who remembered gleefully that he has been owing me a trifling sum for the past four

years, and in fact has preserved a note to this effect.) Within the last week I have hatched a desperate plan : I have made up my mind to take a wife—a rich one, *bien entendu*. Why not accept the goods of the gods ? It is not my fault, after all, if I pass for a good fellow. Why not admit that practically, mechanically—as I may say—maritally, I *may* be a good fellow ? I warrant myself kind. I should never beat my wife ; I don't think I should even contradict her. Assume that her fortune has the proper number of zeros and that she herself is one of them, and I can even imagine her adoring me. I really think this is my only way. Curiously, as I look back upon my brief career, it all seems to tend to this consummation. It has its graceful curves and crooks, indeed, and here and there a passionate tangent ; but, on the whole, if I were to unfold it here *à la* Hogarth, what better legend could I scrawl beneath the series of pictures than So-and-so's Progress to a Mercenary Marriage ?

Coming events do what we all know with their shadows. My noble fate is, perhaps, not far off. I already feel throughout my person a magnificent languor—as from the possession of many dollars. Or is it simply my sense of well-being in this perfectly appointed house ? Is it simply the contact of the highest civilisation I have known ? At all events, the place is of velvet, and my only complaint of Mr. Sloane is that, instead of an old widower, he's not an old widow (or a young maid), so that I might marry him, survive him, and dwell for ever in this rich and mellow home. As I write here, at my bedroom table, I have only to stretch out an arm and raise the window-curtain, to see the thick-planted garden budding and breathing and growing in the silvery silence. Far above, in the liquid darkness, rolls the brilliant ball of the moon ; beneath, in its light, lies the lake, in murmuring, troubled sleep ;

round about, the mountains, looking strange and blanched, seem to bare their heads and undrape their shoulders. So much for midnight. To-morrow the scene will be lovely with the beauty of day. Under one aspect or another I have it always before me. At the end of the garden is moored a boat, in which Theodore and I have indulged in an immense deal of irregular navigation. What lovely landward coves and bays—what alder-smothered creeks—what lily-sheeted pools—what sheer steep hillsides, making the water dark and quiet where they hang! I confess that in these excursions Theodore looks after the boat and I after the scenery. Mr. Sloane avoids the water—on account of the dampness, he says; because he's afraid of drowning, I suspect.

22nd.—Theodore is right. The *bonhomme* has taken me into his favour. I protest I don't see how he was to escape it. *Je l'ai bien soigné*, as they say in Paris. I don't blush for it. In one coin or another I must repay his hospitality—which is certainly very liberal. Theodore dots his *i*'s, crosses his *t*'s, verifies his quotations; while I set traps for that famous "curiosity." This speaks vastly well for my powers. He pretends to be surprised at nothing, and to possess in perfection—poor, pitiable old fop—the art of keeping his countenance; but repeatedly, I know, I have made him stare. As for his corruption, which I spoke of above, it's a very pretty piece of wickedness, but it strikes me as a purely intellectual matter. I imagine him never to have had any positive senses. He may have been unclean; morally, he's not very tidy now; but he never can have been what the French call a *viveur*. He's too delicate, he's of a feminine turn; and what woman was ever a *viveur*? He likes to sit in his chair and read scandal, talk scandal, make scandal, so far as he may without catching a cold or bringing on a headache. I already

feel as if I had known him a lifetime. I read him as clearly as if I had. I know the type to which he belongs ; I have encountered, first and last, a good many specimens of it. He's neither more nor less than a gossip—a gossip flanked by a coxcomb and an egotist. He's shallow, vain, cold, superstitious, timid, pretentious, capricious : a pretty list of foibles ! And yet, for all this, he has his good points. His caprices are sometimes generous, and his rebellion against the ugliness of life frequently makes him do kind things. His memory (for trifles) is remarkable, and (where his own performances are not involved) his taste is excellent. He has no courage for evil, more than for good. He is the victim, however, of more illusions with regard to himself than I ever knew a single brain to shelter. At the age of twenty, poor, ignorant, and remarkably handsome, he married a woman of immense wealth, many years his senior. At the end of three years she very considerably took herself off and left him to the enjoyment of his freedom and riches. If he had remained poor he might from time to time have rubbed at random against the truth, and would be able to recognise the touch of it. But he wraps himself in his money as in a wadded dressing-gown, and goes trundling through life on his little gold wheels. The greater part of his career, from the time of his marriage till about ten years ago, was spent in Europe, which, superficially, he knows very well. He has lived in fifty places, known thousands of people, and spent a very large fortune. At one time, I believe, he spent considerably too much, trembled for an instant on the verge of a pecuniary crash, but recovered himself, and found himself more frightened than hurt, yet audibly recommended to lower his pitch. He passed five years in a species of penitent seclusion on the lake of—I forget what (his genius seems to be partial to lakes),

and laid the basis of his present magnificent taste for literature. I can't call him anything but magnificent in this respect, so long as he must have his punctuation done by a *nature distinguée*. At the close of this period, by economy, he had made up his losses. His turning the screw during those relatively impecunious years represents, I am pretty sure, the only act of resolution of his life. It was rendered possible by his morbid, his actually pusillanimous dread of poverty ; he doesn't feel safe without half a million between him and starvation. Meanwhile he had turned from a young man into an old man ; his health was broken, his spirit was jaded, and I imagine, to do him justice, that he began to feel certain natural, filial longings for this dear American mother of us all. They say the most hopeless truants and triflers have come to it. He came to it, at all events ; he packed up his books and pictures and gimcracks, and bade farewell to Europe. This house which he now occupies belonged to his wife's estate. She had, for sentimental reasons of her own, commended it to his particular care. On his return he came to see it, liked it, turned a parcel of carpenters and upholsterers into it, and by inhabiting it for nine years transformed it into the perfect dwelling which I find it. Here he has spent all his time, with the exception of a usual winter's visit to New York—a practice recently discontinued, owing to the increase of his ailments and the projection of these famous memoirs. His life has finally come to be passed in comparative solitude. He tells of various distant relatives, as well as intimate friends of both sexes, who used formerly to be entertained at his cost ; but with each of them, in the course of time, he seems to have succeeded in quarrelling. Throughout life, evidently, he has had capital fingers for plucking off parasites. Rich, lonely, and vain, he must have been fair game for the race

of social sycophants and cormorants ; and it's much to the credit of his sharpness, and that instinct of self-defence which nature bestows even on the weak, that he has not been despoiled and *exploité*. Apparently they have all been bunglers. I maintain that something is to be done with him still. But one must work in obedience to certain definite laws. Doctor Jones, his physician, tells me, in point of fact, he has had for the past ten years an unbroken series of favourites, *protégés*, heirs presumptive ; but that each, in turn, by some fatally false movement, has spilled his pottage. The doctor declares, moreover, that they were mostly very common people. Gradually the old man seems to have developed a preference for two or three strictly exquisite intimates, over a throng of your vulgar pensioners. His tardy literary schemes, too—fruit of his all but sapless senility—have absorbed more and more of his time and attention. The end of it all is, therefore, that Theodore and I have him quite to ourselves, and that it behoves us to hold our porringers straight.

Poor, pretentious old simpleton ! It's not his fault, after all, that he fancies himself a great little man. How are you to judge of the stature of mankind when men have for ever addressed you on their knees ? Peace and joy to his innocent fatuity ! He believes himself the most rational of men ; in fact, he's the most superstitious. He fancies himself a philosopher, an inquirer, a discoverer. He has not yet discovered that he is a humbug, that Theodore is a prig, and that I am an adventurer. He prides himself on his good manners, his urbanity, his knowing a rule of conduct for every occasion in life. My private impression is that his skinny old bosom contains unsuspected treasures of impertinence. He takes his stand on his speculative audacity—his direct, undaunted gaze at the universe ; in truth, his



mind is haunted by a hundred dingy old-world spectres and theological phantasms. He imagines himself one of the most solid of men ; he is essentially one of the hollowest. He thinks himself ardent, impulsive, passionate, magnanimous — capable of boundless enthusiasm for an idea or a sentiment. It is clear to me that on no occasion of disinterested action can he ever have done anything in time. He believes, finally, that he has drained the cup of life to the dregs ; that he has known, in its bitterest intensity, every emotion of which the human spirit is capable ; that he has loved, struggled, suffered. Mere vanity, all of it. He has never loved any one but himself ; he has never suffered from anything but an undigested supper or an exploded pretension ; he has never touched with the end of his lips the vulgar bowl from which the mass of mankind quaffs its floods of joy and sorrow. Well, the long and short of it all is, that I honestly pity him. He may have given sly knocks in his life, but he can't hurt any one now. I pity his ignorance, his weakness, his pusillanimity. He has tasted the real sweetness of life no more than its bitterness ; he has never dreamed, nor experimented, nor dared ; he has never known any but mercenary affection : neither men nor women have risked ought for *him*—for his good spirits, his good looks, his empty pockets. How I should like to give him, for once, a real sensation !

26th.—I took a row this morning with Theodore a couple of miles along the lake, to a point where we went ashore and lounged away an hour in the sunshine, which is still very comfortable. Poor Theodore seems troubled about many things. For one, he is troubled about me ; he is actually more anxious about my future than I myself ; he thinks better of me than I do of myself ; he is so deucedly conscientious, so scrupulous, so averse to giving offence



or to *brusquer* any situation before it has played itself out, that he shrinks from betraying his apprehensions or asking direct questions. But I know that he would like very much to extract from me some intimation that there is something under the sun I should like to do. I catch myself in the act of taking—heaven forgive me!—a half-malignant joy in confounding his expectations—leading his generous sympathies off the scent by giving him momentary glimpses of my latent wickedness. But in Theodore I have so firm a friend that I shall have a considerable job if I ever find it needful to make him change his mind about me. He admires me—that's absolute; he takes my low moral tone for an eccentricity of genius, and it only imparts an extra flavour—a *haut goût*—to the charm of my intercourse. Nevertheless, I can see that he is disappointed. I have even less to show, after all these years, than he had hoped. Heaven help us, little enough it must strike him as being! What a contradiction there is in our being friends at all! I believe we shall end with hating each other. It's all very well now—our agreeing to differ, for we haven't opposed interests. But if we should *really* clash, the situation would be warm! I wonder, as it is, that Theodore keeps his patience with me. His education since we parted should tend logically to make him despise me. He has studied, thought, suffered, loved—loved those very plain sisters and nieces. Poor me! how should I be virtuous? I have no sisters, plain or pretty!—nothing to love, work for, live for. My good Theodore, if you are going one of these days to despise me and drop me—in the name of comfort, come to the point at once, and make an end of our state of tension.

He is troubled, too, about Mr. Sloane. His attitude towards the *bonhomme* quite passes my comprehension. It's the queerest jumble of contraries. He

penetrates him, disapproves of him—yet respects and admires him. It all comes of the poor boy's shrinking New England conscience. He's afraid to give his perceptions a fair chance, lest, forsooth, they should look over his neighbour's wall. He'll not understand that he may as well sacrifice the old reprobate for a lamb as for a sheep. His view of the gentleman, therefore, is a perfect tissue of cobwebs—a jumble of half-way sorrows, and wire-drawn charities, and hair-breadth 'scapes from utter damnation, and sudden platitudes of generosity—fit, all of it, to make an angel curse !

"The man's a perfect egotist and ass," say I, "but I like him." Now Theodore likes him—or rather wants to like him ; but he can't reconcile it to his self-respect—fastidious deity !—to like an ass. Why the deuce can't he leave it alone altogether ? It's a purely practical matter. He ought to do the duties of his place all the better for having his head clear of officious sentiment. I don't believe in disinterested service ; and Theodore is too desperately bent on preserving his disinterestedness. With me it's different. I am perfectly free to love the *bon-homme*—for an ass. I am neither a scribe nor a Pharisee ; I am simply a student of the art of life.

And then, Theodore is troubled about his sisters ; he's afraid he's not doing his duty by them. He thinks he ought to be with them—to be getting a larger salary—to be teaching his nieces. I am not versed in such questions. Perhaps he ought !

*May 3rd.*—This morning Theodore sent me word that he was ill and unable to get up ; upon which I immediately went in to see him. He had caught cold, was sick and a little feverish. I urged him to make no attempt to leave his room, and assured him that I would do what I could to reconcile Mr. Sloane to his absence. This I found an easy matter. I read

to him for a couple of hours, wrote four letters—one in French—and then talked for a while—a good while. I have done more talking, by the way, in the last fortnight than in any previous twelve months—much of it, too, none of the wisest, nor, I may add, of the most superstitiously veracious. In a little discussion, two or three days ago, with Theodore, I came to the point and let him know that in gossiping with Mr. Sloane I made no scruple, for our common satisfaction, of “colouring” more or less. My confession gave him that “turn,” as Mrs. Gamp would say, that his present illness may be the result of it. Nevertheless, poor dear fellow, I trust he will be on his legs to-morrow. This afternoon, somehow, I found myself really in the humour of talking. There was something propitious in the circumstances: a hard, cold rain without, a wood-fire in the library, the *bonhomme* puffing cigarettes in his arm-chair, beside him a portfolio of newly-imported prints and photographs, and—Theodore tucked safely away in bed. Finally, when I brought our *tête-à-tête* to a close (taking good care not to overstay my welcome) Mr. Sloane seized me by both hands and honoured me with one of his venerable grins. “Max,” he said—“you must let me call you Max—you are the most delightful man I ever knew.”

Verily, there’s some virtue left in me yet. I believe I almost blushed.

“Why didn’t I know you ten years ago?” the old man went on. “There are ten years lost.”

“Ten years ago I was not worth your knowing,” Max remarked.

“But I did know you!” cried the *bonhomme*. “I knew you in knowing your mother.”

Ah! my mother again. When the old man begins that chapter it’s all I can do not to tell him to blow out his candle and go to bed.

"At all events," he continued, "we must make the most of the years that remain. I am a rotten old carcass, but I have no intention of dying. You won't get tired of me and want to go away?"

"I am devoted to you, sir," I said. "But I must be looking for some occupation, you know."

"Occupation? bother! I will give you occupation. I will give you wages."

"I am afraid that you will want to give me the wages without the work." And then I declared that I must go up and look at poor Theodore.

The *bonhomme* still kept my hands. "I wish very much that I could get you to be as fond of me as you are of poor Theodore."

"Ah, don't talk about fondness, Mr. Sloane. I don't deal much in that article."

"Don't you like my secretary?"

"Not as he deserves."

"Nor as he likes you, perhaps?"

"He likes me more than I deserve."

"Well, Max," my host pursued, "we can be good friends all the same. We don't need a hocus-pocus of false sentiment. We are *men*, aren't we?—men of sublime good sense." And just here, as the old man looked at me, the pressure of his hands deepened to a convulsive grasp, and the bloodless mask of his countenance was suddenly distorted with a nameless fear. "Ah, my dear young man," he cried, "come and be a son to me—the son of my age and desolation! For God's sake, don't leave me to pine and die alone!"

I was greatly surprised, and I may add considerably moved. Is it true, then, that this dilapidated organism contains such measureless depths of sensibility? He has evidently a mortal fear of death. I assured him on my honour that he may henceforth call upon me for any service.

8th.—Theodore's little turn proved more serious than I expected. He has been confined to his room till to-day. This evening he came down to the library in his dressing-gown. Decidedly, Mr. Sloane is an eccentric, but hardly as Theodore thinks, a superior one. There is something extremely curious in his humours and caprices—the incongruous fits and starts, as it were, of his taste. For some reason, best known to himself, he took it into his head to regard it as a want of delicacy, of respect, of *savoir-vivre*—of heaven knows what—that poor Theodore, who is still weak and languid, should enter the sacred precinct of his study in the vulgar drapery of a dressing-gown. The sovereign trouble with the *bonhomme* is an absolute lack of the instinct of justice. He's of the real feminine turn—I believe I have written it before—without the redeeming fidelity of the sex. I honestly believe that I might come into his study in my night-shirt and he would smile at it as a picturesque *déshabillé*. But for poor Theodore to-night there was nothing but scowls and frowns, and barely a civil inquiry about his health. But poor Theodore is not such a fool, either ; he will not die of a snubbing ; I never said he was a weakling. Once he fairly saw from what quarter the wind blew he bore the master's brutality with the utmost coolness and gallantry. Can it be that Mr. Sloane really wishes to drop him ? The delicious old brute ! He understands favour and friendship only as a selfish rapture—a reaction, an infatuation, an act of aggressive, exclusive patronage. It's not a bestowal, with him, but a transfer, and half his pleasure in causing his sun to shine is that—being woefully near its setting—it will produce certain long fantastic shadows. He wants to cast my shadow, I suppose, over Theodore ; but fortunately I am not altogether an opaque body. Since Theodore was taken ill he has been into his room but once, and has

sent him none but a dry little message or two. I too have been much less attentive than I should have wished to be ; but my time has not been my own. It has been, every moment of it, at the disposal of my host. He actually runs after me, he clings to me, he makes a fool of himself, and is trying hard to make one of me. I find that he will bear—that, in fact, he actually enjoys—a sort of unexpected contradiction. He likes anything that will tickle his fancy, give an unusual tone to our relations, remind him of certain historical characters whom he thinks he resembles. I have stepped into Theodore's shoes, and done—with what I feel in my bones to be very inferior skill and taste—all the reading, writing, condensing, transcribing and advising that he has been accustomed to do. I have driven with the *bonhomme*, played chess and cribbage with him, beaten him, bullied him, contradicted him, forced him into going out on the water under my charge. Who shall say, after this, that I haven't done my best to discourage his advances, put myself in a bad light ? As yet, my efforts are vain ; in fact, they quite turn to my own confusion. Mr. Sloane is so thankful at having escaped from the lake with his life that he looks upon me as a preserver and protector. Confound it all ; it's a bore ! But one thing is certain, it can't last for ever. Admit that he *has* cast Theodore out and taken me in ; he will speedily discover that he has made a pretty mess of it, and that he had much better have left well enough alone. He likes my reading and writing now, but in a month he will begin to hate them. He will miss Theodore's better temper and better knowledge—his healthy impersonal judgement. What an advantage that well-regulated youth has over me, after all ! I am for days, he is for years ; he for the long run, I for the short. I, perhaps, am intended for success, but he is adapted for happiness.



He has in his heart a tiny, sacred particle which leavens his whole being and keeps it pure and sound—a faculty of admiration and respect. For him human nature is still a wonder and a mystery ; it bears a divine stamp—Mr. Sloane's tawdry composition as well as the rest.

13th.—I have refused, of course, to supplant Theodore further in the exercise of his functions, and he has resumed his morning labours with Mr. Sloane. I, on my side, have spent these dewy hours in scouring the country on that capital black mare, the use of which is one of the perquisites of Theodore's place. The days have been magnificent—the heat of the sun tempered by a murmuring, wandering wind, the whole north a mighty ecstasy of sound and verdure, the sky a far-away vault of warm blue air. Not far from the mill at M——, the other end of the lake, I met, for the third time, that very pretty girl who reminds me so forcibly of Antoinette. She makes so lavish a use of her eyes that I ventured to stop and bid her good-morning. She seems nothing loath to an acquaintance. She's a fearful barbarian in speech, but the eyes are quite articulate. These rides do me good ; I was growing too pensive.

There is something the matter with Theodore ; his illness seems to have left him strangely affected. He has fits of silent stiffness, alternating with spasms of extravagant gaiety. He avoids me at times for hours together, and then he comes and looks at me with an inscrutable smile, as if he were on the verge of a burst of confidence—which again is swallowed up in the immensity of his dumbness. Is he hatching some astounding benefit to his species ? Is he working to bring about my removal to a higher sphere of action ? *Nous verrons bien.*

18th.—Theodore threatens departure. He received this morning a letter from one of his sisters—the young



Dora—announcing her engagement to a clergyman whose acquaintance she has recently made, and intimating her expectation of an immediate union with the gentleman—a ceremony which would require Theodore's attendance. Theodore, in high good humour, read the letter aloud at breakfast—and, to tell the truth, it was a charming epistle. He then spoke of his having to go on to the wedding, a proposition to which Mr. Sloane graciously assented—much more than assented. "I shall be sorry to lose you, after so happy a connexion," said the old man. Theodore turned pale, stared a moment, and then, recovering his colour and his composure, declared that he should have no objection in life to coming back.

"Bless your soul!" cried the *bonhomme*, "you don't mean to say you will leave your other sister all alone?"

To which Theodore replied that he would arrange for her and her little girl to live with the married pair. "It's the only proper thing," he remarked, as if it were quite settled. Has it come to this, then, that Mr. Sloane actually wants to turn him out of the house? The shameless old villain! He keeps smiling an uncanny smile, which means, as I read it, that if the poor young man once departs he shall never return on the old footing—for all his impudence!

20th.—This morning, at breakfast, we had a terrific scene. A letter arrives for Theodore; he opens it, turns white and red, frowns, falters, and then informs us that the young Dora has broken off her engagement. No wedding, therefore, and no departure for Theodore. The old man was furious. In his fury he took the liberty of calling the *belle capricieuse* a very exaggerated name. Theodore rebuked him, with perfect good taste, and kept his temper.

"If my opinions don't suit you, Mr. Lisle," the

old man broke out, "and my mode of expressing them displeases you, you know you can easily protect yourself."

"My dear Mr. Sloane," said Theodore, "your opinions, as a general thing, interest me deeply, and have never ceased to act beneficially upon the formation of my own. Your mode of expressing them is always brilliant, and I wouldn't for the world, after all our pleasant intercourse, separate from you in bitterness. Only, I repeat, your qualification of my sister's conduct is quite too precipitate. If you knew her, you would be the first to admit it."

There was something in Theodore's look and manner, as he said these words, which puzzled me all the morning. After dinner, finding myself alone with him, I told him I was glad he was not obliged to go away. He looked at me with the mysterious smile I have mentioned, thanked me, and fell into meditation. As this bescribbled chronicle is the record of my *bêtises* as well as my happy strokes, I needn't hesitate to say that for a moment I was a good deal vexed. What business has this angel of candour to deal in signs and portents, to look unutterable things? What right has he to do so with me especially, in whom he has always professed an absolute confidence? Just as I was about to cry out, "Come, my dear fellow, this 'affectation of mystery has lasted quite long enough—favour me at last with the result of your cogitations!"—as I was on the point of thus expressing my impatience of his ominous behaviour, the oracle at last addressed itself to utterance.

"You see, my dear Max," he said, "I can't, in justice to myself, go away in obedience to the sort of notice that was served on me this morning. What do you think of my actual footing here?"

Theodore's actual footing here seems to me impossible; of course I said so.

"No, I assure you it's not," he answered. "I should, on the contrary, feel very uncomfortable to think that I had come away, except by my own choice. You see a man can't afford to cheapen himself. What are you laughing at?"

"I am laughing, in the first place, my dear fellow, to hear on your lips the language of cold calculation; and, in the second place, at your odd notion of the process by which a man keeps himself up in the market."

"I assure you it's the correct system. I came here as a particular favour to Mr. Sloane; it was expressly understood so. The sort of work was odious to me; I had regularly to break myself in. I had to trample on my convictions, preferences, prejudices. I don't take such things easily; I take them hard; and when once the effort has been made I can't consent to have it wasted. If Mr. Sloane needed me then, he needs me still. I am ignorant of any change having taken place in his intentions, or in his means of satisfying them. I came, not to amuse him, but to do a certain work; I hope to remain until the work is completed. To go away sooner is to make a confession of incapacity which, I protest, costs me too much. I am too conceited, if you like."

Theodore spoke these words with a face which I have never seen him wear—a fixed, mechanical smile, a hard, dry glitter in his eye, a harsh, strident tone in his voice—in his whole physiognomy a gleam, as it were, a note of defiance. Now I confess that for defiance I have never been conscious of any especial relish—when I am defied I am beastly. "My dear man," I replied, "your sentiments do you prodigious credit. Your very ingenious theory of your present situation, as well as your extremely pronounced sense of your personal value, are calculated to insure you a degree of practical success which can very well

dispense with the furtherance of my poor good wishes." Oh, the grimness of his visage as he listened to this, and, I suppose I may add, the grimness of mine ! But I have ceased to be puzzled. Theodore's conduct for the past ten days is suddenly illumined with a backward, lurid ray. I will note down here a few plain truths which it behoves me to take to heart—commit to memory. Theodore is jealous of Maximus Austin. Theodore hates the said Maximus. Theodore has been seeking for the past three months to see his name written, last but not least, in a certain testamentary document : " Finally, I bequeath to my dear young friend, Theodore Lisle, in return for invaluable services and unfailing devotion, the bulk of my property, real and personal, consisting of ——" (hereupon follows an exhaustive enumeration of houses, lands, public securities, books, pictures, horses and dogs). It is for this that he has toiled and watched and prayed ; submitted to intellectual weariness and spiritual torture ; accommodated himself to levity, blasphemy and insult. For this he sets his teeth and tightens his grasp ; for this he'll fight. Dear me, it's an immense weight off one's mind ! There are nothing, then, but vulgar, common laws ; no sublime exceptions, no transcendent anomalies. Theodore's a knave, a hypo——nay, nay ; stay, irreverent hand !—Theodore's a *man* ! Well, that's all I want. *He* wants to fight—he shall have it. Have I got, at last, my simple, natural emotion ?

21st.—I have lost no time. This evening, late, after I had heard Theodore go to his room (I had left the library early, on the pretext of having letters to write), I repaired to Mr. Sloane, who had not yet gone to bed, and informed him I should be obliged to leave him at once, and pick up a subsistence somehow in New York. He felt the blow ; it brought him straight down on his marrow-bones. He went

through the whole gamut of his arts and graces : he blustered, whimpered, entreated, flattered. He tried to drag in Theodore's name ; but this, of course, I prevented. But, finally, why, *why*, WHY, after all my promises of fidelity, must I thus cruelly desert him ? Then came my trump card : I have spent my last penny ; while I stay, I'm a beggar. The remainder of this extraordinary scene I have no power to describe : how the *bonhomme*, touched, inflamed, inspired, by the thought of my destitution, and at the same time annoyed, perplexed, bewildered at having to commit himself to doing anything for me, worked himself into a nervous frenzy which deprived him of a clear sense of the value of his words and his actions ; how I, prompted by the irresistible spirit of my desire to leap astride of his weakness and ride it hard to the goal of my dreams, cunningly contrived to keep his spirit at the fever-point, so that strength and reason and resistance should burn themselves out. I shall probably never again have such a sensation as I enjoyed to-night — actually feel a heated human heart throbbing and turning and struggling in my grasp ; know its pants, its spasms, its convulsions, and its final senseless quiescence. At half-past one o'clock Mr. Sloane got out of his chair, went to his secretary, opened a private drawer, and took out a folded paper. " This is my will, made some seven weeks ago. If you will stay with me I will destroy it."

" Really, Mr. Sloane," I said, " if you think my purpose is to exert any pressure upon your testamentary inclinations——"

" I will tear it in pieces," he cried ; " I will burn it up ! I shall be as sick as a dog to-morrow ; but I will do it. A-a-h !"

He clapped his hand to his side, as if in sudden, overwhelming pain, and sank back, fainting, into his chair. A single glance assured me that he was un-

conscious. I possessed myself of the paper, opened it, and perceived that he had left everything to his saintly secretary. For an instant a savage, puerile feeling of hate popped up in my bosom, and I came within a hair's-breadth of obeying my foremost impulse—that of stuffing the document into the fire. Fortunately, my reason overtook my passion, though for a moment it was an even race. I put the paper back into the bureau, closed it, and rang the bell for Robert (the old man's servant). Before he came I stood watching the poor, pale remnant of mortality before me, and wondering whether those feeble life-gasps were numbered. He was as white as a sheet, grimacing with pain—horribly ugly. Suddenly he opened his eyes; they met my own; I fell on my knees and took his hands. They closed on mine with a grasp strangely akin to the rigidity of death. Nevertheless, since then he has revived, and has relapsed again into a comparatively healthy sleep. Robert seems to know how to deal with him.

22nd.—Mr. Sloane is seriously ill—out of his mind and unconscious of people's identity. The doctor has been here, off and on, all day, but this evening reports improvement. I have kept out of the old man's room, and confined myself to my own, reflecting largely upon the chance of his immediate death. Does Theodore know of the will? Would it occur to him to divide the property? Would it occur to me, in his place? We met at dinner, and talked in a grave, desultory, friendly fashion. After all, he's an excellent fellow. I don't hate him. I don't even dislike him. He jars on me, *il m'agace*; but that's no reason why I should do him an evil turn. Nor shall I. The property is a fixed idea, that's all. I shall get it if I can. We are fairly matched. Before heaven, no, we are not fairly matched! Theodore has a conscience.



23rd.—I am restless and nervous—and for good reasons. Scribbling here keeps me quiet. This morning Mr. Sloane is better; feeble and uncertain in mind, but unmistakably on the rise. I may confess now that I feel relieved of a horrid burden. Last night I hardly slept a wink. I lay awake listening to the pendulum of my clock. It seemed to say, “He lives—he dies.” I fully expected to hear it stop suddenly at *dies*. But it kept going all the morning, and to a decidedly more lively tune. In the afternoon the old man sent for me. I found him in his great muffled bed, with his face the colour of damp chalk, and his eyes glowing faintly, like torches half stamped out. I was forcibly struck with the utter loneliness of his lot. For all human attendance my villainous self grinning at his bedside and old Robert without, listening, doubtless, at the keyhole. The *bonhomme* stared at me stupidly; then seemed to know me, and greeted me with a sickly smile. It was some moments before he was able to speak. At last he faintly bade me to descend into the library, open the secret drawer of the secretary (which he contrived to direct me how to do), possess myself of his will, and burn it up. He appears to have forgotten his having taken it out the night before last. I told him that I had an insurmountable aversion to any personal dealings with the document. He smiled, patted the back of my hand, and requested me, in that case, to get it at least and bring it to him. I couldn’t deny him that favour? No, I couldn’t, indeed. I went down to the library, therefore, and on entering the room found Theodore standing by the fireplace with a bundle of papers. The secretary was open. I stood still, looking from the violated cabinet to the documents in his hand. Among them I recognised, by its shape and size, the paper of which I had intended to possess myself. Without



delay I walked straight up to him. He looked surprised, but not confused. "I am afraid I shall have to trouble you to surrender one of those papers," I said.

"Surrender, Maximus? To anything of your own you are perfectly welcome. I didn't know that you made use of Mr. Sloane's secretary. I was looking for some pages of notes which I have myself made, and in which I conceive I have a property."

"This is what I want, *mon vieux*," I said; and I drew the will, unfolded, from between his hands. As I did so his eyes fell upon the superscription, "Last Will and Testament. March. F. S." He flushed an extraordinary crimson. Our eyes met. Somehow—I don't know how or why, or for that matter why not—I burst into a violent peal of laughter. Theodore stood staring, with two hot, bitter tears in his eyes.

"Of course you think I came to ferret out that thing," he said.

I shrugged my shoulders—those of my body only. I confess, morally, I was on my knees with contrition, but there was a fascination in it—a fatality. I remembered that in the hurry of my movements the other evening I had slipped the will simply into one of the outer drawers of the cabinet, among Theodore's own papers. "Mr. Sloane sent me for it," I said.

"Very good; I am glad to hear he's well enough to think of such things."

"He means to destroy it."

"I hope, then, he has another made."

"Mentally, I suppose he has."

"Unfortunately, his weakness isn't mental—or exclusively so."

"Oh, he will live to make a dozen more!" I exclaimed. "Do you know the purport of this one?"

Theodore's colour by this time had died away into plain white. He shook his head. The doggedness of the movement provoked me, and I wished to excite his curiosity. "I have his commission to destroy it."

Theodore smiled very grandly. "It's not a task I envy you," he remarked.

"I should think not—especially if you knew the import of the will." He stood with folded arms, regarding me with his cold, detached eyes. I couldn't stand it. "Come, it's your property! You are sole legatee. I give it up to you." And I thrust the paper into his hand.

He received it mechanically; but after a pause, bethinking himself, he unfolded it and cast his eyes over the contents. Then he slowly smoothed it together and held it a moment with a tremulous hand. "You say that Mr. Sloane directed you to destroy it?" he finally inquired.

"I say so."

"And that you know the contents?"

"Exactly."

"And that you were about to do what he asked you?"

"On the contrary, I declined."

Theodore fixed his eyes for a moment on the superscription and then raised them again to my face. "Thank you, Max," he said. "You have left me a real satisfaction." He tore the sheet across and threw the bits into the fire. We stood watching them burn. "Now he can make another," said Theodore.

"Twenty others," I replied.

"No, I have an idea you will take care of that."

"You are very bitter," I said, sharply enough.

"No, I am perfectly indifferent. Farewell!" And he put out his hand.

"Are you going away?"

"Of course I am. Good-bye!"

" Good-bye, then. But isn't your departure rather sudden ? "

" I ought to have gone three weeks ago—three weeks ago." I had taken his hand, he pulled it away ; his voice was trembling—there were tears in it.

" Is *that* indifference ? " I asked.

" It's something you will never know ! " he cried. " It's shame ! I am not sorry you should see what I feel. It will suggest to you, perhaps, that my heart has never been in this filthy contest. Let me assure you, at any rate, that it hasn't ; that it has had nothing but scorn for the base perversion of my pride and my ambition. I could easily shed tears of joy at their return—the return of the prodigals ! Tears of sorrow—sorrow——"

He was unable to go on. He sank into a chair, covering his face with his hands.

" For God's sake, stick to the joy ! " I exclaimed.

He rose to his feet again. " Well," he said, " it was for your sake that I parted with my self-respect ; with your assistance I recover it."

" How for my sake ? "

" For whom but you would I have gone so far as I did ? For what other purpose than that of keeping our friendship whole would I have borne you company into this narrow pass ? A man whom I cared for less I would long since have parted with. You were needed—you and something you have about you that always takes me so—to bring me to this. You ennobled, exalted, enchanted the struggle. I *did* value my prospect of coming into Mr. Sloane's property. I valued it for my poor sisters' sake as well as for my own, so long as it was the natural reward of conscientious service, and not the prize of hypocrisy and cunning. With another man than you I never would have contested such a prize. But you fascinated me, even as my rival. You played with

me, deceived me, betrayed me. I held my ground, hoping you would see that what you were doing was not fair. But if you have seen it, it has made no difference with you. For Mr. Sloane, from the moment that, under your magical influence, he revealed his nasty little nature, I had nothing but contempt."

"And for me now?"

"Don't ask me. I don't trust myself."

"Hate, I suppose."

"Is that the best you can imagine? Farewell!"

"Is it a serious farewell—farewell for ever?"

"How can there be any other?"

"I am sorry this should be your point of view. It's characteristic. All the more reason then that I should say a word in self-defence. You accuse me of having 'played with you, deceived you, betrayed you.' It seems to me that you are quite beside the mark. You say you were such a friend of mine; if so, you ought to be one still. It was not to my fine sentiments you attached yourself, for I never had any or pretended to any. In anything I have done recently, therefore, there has been no inconsistency. I never pretended to take one's friendships so seriously. I don't understand the word in the sense you attach to it. I don't understand the feeling of affection between men. To me it means quite another thing. You give it a meaning of your own; you enjoy the profit of your invention: it's no more than just that you should pay the penalty. Only it seems to me rather hard that *I* should pay it." Theodore remained silent, but he looked quite sick. "Is it still a 'serious farewell'?" I went on. "It seems a pity. After this clearing-up oughtn't one to be on rather better terms with you? No man can have a deeper appreciation of your excellent parts, a keener enjoyment of your society. I should very much regret the loss of it."

"Have we, then, all this while understood each other so little?" said Theodore.

"Don't say 'we' and 'each other.' I think I have understood you."

"Very likely. It's not for my having kept anything back."

"Well, I do you justice. To me you have always been over-generous. Try now and be just."

Still he stood silent, with his cold, hard frown. It was plain that if he was to come back to me, it would be from the other world—if there be one! What he was going to answer I know not. The door opened, and Robert appeared, pale, trembling, his eyes starting out of his head.

"I verily believe that poor Mr. Sloane is dead in his bed!" he cried.

There was a moment's perfect silence. "Amen," said I. "Yes, old boy, try and be just." Mr. Sloane had quietly died in my absence.

24<sup>th</sup>.—Theodore went up to town this morning, having shaken hands with me in silence before he started. Doctor Jones, and Brooks the attorney, have been very officious, and by their advice I have telegraphed to a certain Miss Meredith, a maiden-lady, by their account the nearest of kin; or, in other words, simply a discarded niece of the defunct. She telegraphs back that she will arrive in person for the funeral. I shall remain till she comes. I have lost a fortune, but have I irretrievably lost a friend? I am sure I can't say. Yes, I shall wait for Miss Meredith.



## GEORGINA'S REASONS





SHE was certainly a singular girl, and if he felt at the end that he didn't know her nor understand her, it is not surprising that he should have felt it at the beginning. But he felt at the beginning what he did not feel at the end, that her singularity took the form of a charm which—once circumstances had made them so intimate—it was impossible to resist or conjure away. He had a strange impression (it amounted at times to a positive distress, and shot through the sense of pleasure, morally speaking, with the acuteness of a sudden twinge of neuralgia) that it would be better for each of them that they should break off short and never see each other again. In later years he called this feeling a foreboding, and remembered two or three occasions when he had been on the point of expressing it to Georgina. Of course, in fact, he never expressed it; there were plenty of good reasons for that. Happy love is not disposed to assume disagreeable duties; and Raymond Benyon's love was happy, in spite of grave presentiments, in spite of the singularity of his mistress and the insufferable rudeness of her parents. She was a tall, fair girl, with a beautiful cold eye, and a smile of which the perfect sweetness, proceeding from the lips, was full of compensation; she had auburn hair, of a hue that could be qualified as nothing less than gorgeous, and she seemed to move through life with a stately grace, as she would have walked through

an old-fashioned minuet. Gentlemen connected with the navy have the advantage of seeing many types of women ; they are able to compare the ladies of New York with those of Valparaiso, and those of Halifax with those of the Cape of Good Hope. Raymond Benyon had had these opportunities, and, being fond of women, he had learned his lesson ; he was in a position to appreciate Georgina Gressie's fine points. She looked like a duchess—I don't mean that in foreign ports Benyon had associated with duchesses—and she took everything so seriously. That was flattering for the young man, who was only a lieutenant, detailed for duty at the Brooklyn navy-yard, without a penny in the world but his pay ; with a set of plain, numerous, seafaring, God-fearing relations in New Hampshire, a considerable appearance of talent, a feverish, disguised ambition, and a slight impediment in his speech. He was a spare, tough young man ; his dark hair was straight and fine, and his face, a trifle pale, smooth and carefully drawn. He stammered a little, blushing when he did so, at long intervals. I scarcely know how he appeared on shipboard, but on shore, in his civilian's garb, which was of the neatest, he had as little as possible an aroma of winds and waves. He was neither salt nor brown nor red nor particularly " hearty." He never twitched up his trousers, nor, so far as one could see, did he, with his modest, attentive manner, carry himself as a person accustomed to command. Of course, as a subaltern, he had more to do in the way of obeying. He looked as if he followed some sedentary calling, and was indeed supposed to be decidedly intellectual. He was a lamb with women, to whose charms he was, as I have hinted, susceptible ; but with men he was different, and, I believe, as much of a wolf as was necessary. He had a manner of adoring the handsome, insolent queen of his affections (I will

explain in a moment why I call her insolent) ; indeed, he looked up to her literally, as well as sentimentally, for she was the least bit the taller of the two.

He had met her the summer before on the piazza of an hotel at Fort Hamilton, to which, with a brother-officer, in a dusty buggy, he had driven over from Brooklyn to spend a tremendously hot Sunday—the kind of day when the navy-yard was loathsome ; and the acquaintance had been renewed by his calling in Twelfth Street on New Year's day—a considerable time to wait for a pretext, but which proved the impression had not been transitory. The acquaintance ripened, thanks to a zealous cultivation (on his part) of occasions which Providence, it must be confessed, placed at his disposal none too liberally ; so that now Georgina took up all his thoughts and a considerable part of his time. He was in love with her, beyond a doubt ; but he could not flatter himself that she was smitten with him, though she seemed willing (what was so strange) to quarrel with her family about him. He didn't see how she could really care for him—she was marked out by nature for so much greater a fortune ; and he used to say to her, “ Ah, you don't—there's no use talking, you don't—really care for me at all ! ” To which she answered, “ Really ? You are very particular. It seems to me it's real enough if I let you touch one of my fingertips ! ” That was one of her ways of being insolent. Another was simply her manner of looking at him, or at other people, when they spoke to her, with her hard, divine blue eye—looking quietly, amusedly, with the air of considering, wholly from her own point of view, what they might have said, and then turning her head or her back, while, without taking the trouble to answer them, she broke into a short, liquid, irrelevant laugh. This may seem to contradict what I said just now about her taking the young

lieutenant in the navy seriously. What I mean is that she appeared to take him more seriously than she took anything else. She said to him once, "At any rate you have the merit of not being a shop-keeper"; and it was by this epithet she was pleased to designate most of the young men who at that time flourished in the best society of New York. Even if she had rather a free way of expressing general indifference, a young lady is supposed to be serious enough when she consents to marry you. For the rest, as regards a certain haughtiness that might be observed in Georgina Gressie, my story will probably throw sufficient light upon it. She remarked to Benyon once that it was none of his business why she liked him, but that, to please herself, she didn't mind telling him she thought the great Napoleon, before he was celebrated, before he had command of the army of Italy, must have looked something like him; and she sketched in a few words the sort of figure she imagined the incipient Bonaparte to have been—short, lean, pale, poor, intellectual, and with a tremendous future under his hat. Benyon asked himself whether he had a tremendous future, and what in the world Georgina expected of him in the coming years. He was flattered at the comparison, he was ambitious enough not to be frightened at it, and he guessed that she perceived a certain analogy between herself and the Empress Josephine. She would make a very good empress—that was true; Georgina was remarkably imperial. This may not at first seem to make it more clear why she should take into her favour an aspirant who, on the face of the matter, was not original, and whose Corsica was a flat New England seaport; but it afterwards became plain that he owed his brief happiness—it was very brief—to her father's opposition; her father's and her mother's, and even her uncles' and her aunts'.

## GEORGINA'S REASONS

In those days, in New York, the different members of a family took an interest in its alliances ; and the house of Gressie looked askance at an engagement between the most beautiful of its daughters and a young man who was not in a paying business. Georgina declared that they were meddlesome and vulgar ; she could sacrifice her own people, in that way, without a scruple ; and Benyon's position improved from the moment that Mr. Gressie—ill-advised Mr. Gressie—ordered the girl to have nothing to do with him. Georgina was imperial in this—that she wouldn't put up with an order. When, in the house in Twelfth Street, it began to be talked about that she had better be sent to Europe with some eligible friend, Mrs. Portico for instance, who was always planning to go and who wanted as a companion some young mind, fresh from manuals and extracts, to serve as a fountain of history and geography—when this scheme for getting Georgina out of the way began to be aired, she immediately said to Raymond Benyon, “ Oh yes, I'll marry you ! ” She said it in such an off-hand way that, deeply as he desired her, he was almost tempted to answer, “ But, my dear, have you really thought about it ? ”

## II

THIS little drama went on, in New York, in the ancient days, when Twelfth Street had but lately ceased to be suburban, when the squares had wooden palings, which were not often painted, when there were poplars in important thoroughfares and pigs in the lateral ways, when the theatres were miles distant from Madison Square, and the battered rotunda of Castle Garden echoed with expensive vocal music, when "the park" meant the grass-plats of the City Hall, and the Bloomingdale road was an eligible drive, when Hoboken, of a summer afternoon, was a genteel resort, and the handsomest house in town was on the corner of Fifth Avenue and Fifteenth Street. This will strike the modern reader, I fear, as rather a primitive epoch ; but I am not sure that the strength of human passions is in proportion to the elongation of a city. Several of them, at any rate, the most robust and most familiar—love, ambition, jealousy, resentment, greed—subsisted in considerable force in the little circle at which we have glanced, where a view by no means favourable was taken of Raymond Benyon's attentions to Miss Gressie. Unanimity was a family trait among these people (Georgina was an exception), especially in regard to the important concerns of life, such as marriages and closing scenes. The Gressies hung together ; they were accustomed to do well for themselves, and for each other. They



did everything well : got themselves born well (they thought it excellent to be born a Gressie), lived well, married well, died well, and managed to be well spoken of afterwards. In deference to this last-mentioned habit, I must be careful what I say of them. They took an interest in each other's concerns, an interest that could never be regarded as of a meddling nature, inasmuch as they all thought alike about all their affairs, and interference took the happy form of congratulation and encouragement. These affairs were invariably lucky, and, as a general thing, no Gressie had anything to do but feel that another Gressie had been almost as shrewd and decided as he himself would have been. The great exception to that, as I have said, was this case of Georgina, who struck such a false note, a note that startled them all, when she told her father that she should like to unite herself to a young man engaged in the least paying business that any Gressie had ever heard of. Her two sisters had married into the most flourishing firms, and it was not to be thought of that—with twenty cousins growing up around her—she should put down the standard of success. Her mother had told her a fortnight before this that she must request Mr. Benyon to cease coming to the house ; for hitherto his suit had been of the most public and resolute character. He had been conveyed up-town, from the Brooklyn ferry, in the " stage," on certain evenings, had asked for Miss Georgina at the door of the house in Twelfth Street, and had sat with her in the front parlour if her parents happened to occupy the back, or in the back if the family had disposed itself in the front. Georgina, in her way, was a dutiful girl, and she immediately repeated her mother's admonition to Benyon. He was not surprised, for, though he was aware that he had not, as yet, a great knowledge of society, he flattered himself he

## GEORGINA'S REASONS

could tell when and where a polite young man was not wanted. There were houses in Brooklyn where such an animal was much appreciated, and there the signs were quite different.

They had been discouraging, except on Georgina's part, from the first of his calling in Twelfth Street. Mr. and Mrs. Gressie used to look at each other in silence when he came in, and indulge in strange perpendicular salutations, without any shaking of hands. People did that at Portsmouth, N.H., when they were glad to see you; but in New York there was more luxuriance, and gesture had a different value. He had never, in Twelfth Street, been asked to "take anything," though the house had a delightful suggestion, a positive aroma, of sideboards, as if there were mahogany "cellarettes" under every table. The old people, moreover, had repeatedly expressed surprise at the quantity of leisure that officers in the navy seemed to enjoy. The only way in which they had not made themselves offensive was by always remaining in the other room; though at times even this detachment, to which he owed some delightful moments, presented itself to Benyon as a form of disapprobation. Of course, after Mrs. Gressie's message, his visits were practically at an end: he wouldn't give the girl up, but he wouldn't be beholden to her father for the opportunity to converse with her. Nothing was left for the tender couple—there was a curious mutual mistrust in their tenderness—but to meet in the squares, or in the topmost streets, or in the sidemost avenues, on the spring afternoons. It was especially during this phase of their relations that Georgina struck Benyon as imperial. Her whole person seemed to exhale a tranquil, happy consciousness of having broken a law. She never told him how she arranged the matter at home, how she found it possible always to keep the appointments (to meet

## GEORGINA'S REASONS

him out of the house) that she so boldly made, in what degree she dissimulated to her parents, and how much, in regard to their continued acquaintance, the old people suspected and accepted. If Mr. and Mrs. Gressie had forbidden him the house, it was not, apparently, because they wished her to walk with him in the Tenth Avenue or to sit at his side under the blossoming lilacs in Stuyvesant Square. He didn't believe that she told lies in Twelfth Street ; he thought she was too imperial to lie ; and he wondered what she said to her mother when, at the end of nearly a whole afternoon of vague peregrination with her lover, this rustling, bristling matron asked her where she had been. Georgina was capable of simply telling the truth ; and yet if she simply told the truth it was a wonder that she had not been still more simply packed off to Europe. Benyon's ignorance of her pretexts is a proof that this rather oddly-mated couple never arrived at perfect intimacy, in spite of a fact which remains to be related. He thought of this afterwards, and thought how strange it was that he had not felt more at liberty to ask her what she did for him, and how she did it, and how much she suffered for him. She would probably not have admitted that she suffered at all, and she had no wish to pose for a martyr.

Benyon remembered this, as I say, in the after years, when he tried to explain to himself certain things which simply puzzled him ; it came back to him with the vision, already faded, of shabby cross-streets, straggling toward rivers, with red sunsets, seen through a haze of dust, at the end ; a vista through which the figures of a young man and a girl slowly receded and disappeared, strolling side by side, with the relaxed pace of desultory talk, but more closely linked as they passed into the distance, linked by its at last appearing safe to them—in the Tenth

## GEORGINA'S REASONS

Avenue—that the young lady should take his arm. They were always approaching that inferior thoroughfare ; but he could scarcely have told you, in those days, what else they were approaching. He had nothing in the world but his pay, and he felt that this was rather a “ mean ” income to offer Miss Gressie. Therefore he didn't put it forward ; what he offered, instead, was the expression—crude often, and almost boyishly extravagant—of a delighted admiration of her beauty, the tenderest tones of his voice, the softest assurances of his eye, and the most insinuating pressure of her hand at those moments when she consented to place it in his arm. All this was an eloquence which, if necessary, might have been condensed into a single sentence ; but those few words were scarcely needed when it was as plain that he expected, in general, she would marry him, as it was indefinite that he counted upon her for living on a few hundred a year. If she had been a different girl he might have asked her to wait, might have talked to her of the coming of better days, of his prospective promotion, of its being wiser, perhaps, that he should leave the navy and look about for a more lucrative career. With Georgina it was difficult to go into such questions ; she had no taste whatever for detail. She was delightful as a woman to love, because when a young man is in love he discovers that ; but she could not be called helpful, for she never suggested anything. That is, she never had done so till the day she really proposed—for that was the form it took—to become his wife without more delay. “ Oh yes, I will marry you ” : these words, which I quoted a little way back, were not so much the answer to something he had said at the moment as the light conclusion of a report she had just made (for the first time) of her actual situation in her father's house.

### III

"I AM afraid I shall have to see less of you," she had begun by saying. "They watch me so much."

"It is very little already," he answered. "What is once or twice a week?"

"That's easy for you to say. You are your own master, but you don't know what I go through."

"Do they make it very bad for you, dearest? Do they make scenes?" Benyon asked.

"No, of course not. Don't you know us enough to know how we behave? No scenes; that would be a relief. However, I never make them myself, and I never will—that's one comfort for you, for the future, if you want to know. Father and mother keep very quiet, looking at me as if I were one of the lost, with little hard, piercing eyes, like gimlets. To me they scarcely say anything, but they talk it all over with each other, and try and decide what is to be done. It's my belief that my father has written to the people in Washington—what do you call it?—the Department—to have you moved away from Brooklyn—to have you sent to sea."

"I guess that won't do much good. They want me in Brooklyn; they don't want me at sea."

"Well, they are capable of going to Europe for a year, on purpose to take me," Georgina said.

"How can they take you if you won't go? And if you should go, what good would it do if you were

## GEORGINA'S REASONS

only to find me here when you came back, just the same as you left me ? ”

“ Oh, well ! ” said Georgina, with her lovely smile, “ of course they think that absence would cure me of—cure me of—— ” And she paused, with a kind of cynical modesty, not saying exactly of what.

“ Cure you of what, darling ? Say it, please say it,” the young man murmured, drawing her hand surreptitiously into his arm.

“ Of my absurd infatuation ! ”

“ And would it, dearest ? ”

“ Yes, very likely. But I don't mean to try. I shall not go to Europe—not when I don't want to. But it's better I should see less of you—even that I should appear—a little—to give you up.”

“ A little ? What do you call a little ? ”

Georgina said nothing for a moment. “ Well, that, for instance, you shouldn't hold my hand quite so tight ! ” And she disengaged this conscious member from the pressure of his arm.

“ What good will that do ? ” Benyon asked.

“ It will make them think it's all over—that we have agreed to part.”

“ And as we have done nothing of the kind, how will that help us ? ”

They had stopped at the crossing of a street ; a heavy dray was lumbering slowly past them. Georgina, as she stood there, turned her face to her lover and rested her eyes for some moments on his own. At last, “ Nothing will help us ; I don't think we are very happy,” she answered, while her strange, ironical, inconsequent smile played about her beautiful lips.

“ I don't understand how you see things. I thought you were going to say you would marry me,” Benyon rejoined, standing there still, though the dray had passed.



## GEORGINA'S REASONS

"Oh yes, I will marry you!" And she moved away across the street. That was the way she had said it, and it was very characteristic of her. When he saw that she really meant it, he wished they were somewhere else—he hardly knew where the proper place would be—so that he might take her in his arms. Nevertheless, before they separated that day he had said to her he hoped she remembered they would be very poor, reminding her how great a change she would find it. She answered that she shouldn't mind, and presently she said that if this was all that prevented them the sooner they were married the better. The next time he saw her she was quite of the same opinion; but he found, to his surprise, it was now her conviction that she had better not leave her father's house. The ceremony should take place secretly, of course; but they would wait a while to let their union be known.

"What good will it do us, then?" Raymond Benyon asked.

Georgina coloured. "Well, if you don't know, I can't tell you!"

Then it seemed to him that he did know. Yet, at the same time, he could not see why, once the knot was tied, secrecy should be required. When he asked what especial event they were to wait for, and what should give them the signal to appear as man and wife, she answered that her parents would probably forgive her if they were to discover, not too abruptly, after six months, that she had taken the great step. Benyon supposed that she had ceased to care whether they forgave her or not; but he had already perceived that the nature of women is a queer mosaic. He had believed her capable of marrying him out of bravado, but the pleasure of defiance was absent if the marriage was kept to themselves. It now appeared that she was not especially anxious to



## GEORGINA'S REASONS

defy ; she was disposed rather to manage and temporise.

"Leave it to me ; leave it to me. You are only a blundering man," Georgina said. "I shall know much better than you the right moment for saying, 'Well, you may as well make the best of it, because we have already done it !'"

That might very well be, but Benyon didn't quite understand, and he was awkwardly anxious (for a lover) till it came over him afresh that there was one thing at any rate in his favour, which was simply that the finest girl he had ever seen was ready to throw herself into his arms. When he said to her, "There is one thing I hate in this plan of yours—that, for ever so few weeks, so few days, your father should support my wife"—when he made this homely remark, with a little flush of sincerity in his face, she gave him a specimen of that unanswerable laugh of hers, and declared that it would serve Mr. Gressie right for being so barbarous and so horrid. It was Benyon's view that from the moment she disobeyed her father she ought to cease to avail herself of his protection ; but I am bound to add that he was not particularly surprised at finding this a kind of honour in which her feminine nature was little versed. To make her his wife first—at the earliest moment—whenever she would, and trust to fortune and the new influence he should have to give him, as soon thereafter as possible, complete possession of her : this finally presented itself to the young officer as the course most worthy of a lover and a gentleman. He would be only a pedant who would take nothing because he could not get everything at once. They wandered further than usual this afternoon, and the dusk was thick by the time he brought her back to her father's door. It was not his habit to come so near it, but to-day they had

## GEORGINA'S REASONS

so much to talk about that he actually stood with her for ten minutes at the foot of the steps. He was keeping her hand in his, and she let it rest there while she said—by way of a remark that should sum up all their reasons and reconcile their differences—

“There’s one great thing it will do, you know: it will make me safe.”

“Safe from what?”

“From marrying any one else.”

“Ah, my girl, if you were to do that——!” Benyon exclaimed; but he didn’t mention the other branch of the contingency. Instead of this, he looked aloft at the blind face of the house (there were only dim lights in two or three windows, and no apparent eyes) and up and down the empty street, vague in the friendly twilight; after which he drew Georgina Gressie to his breast and gave her a long, passionate kiss. Yes, decidedly, he felt they had better be married. She had run quickly up the steps, and while she stood there, with her hand on the bell, she almost hissed at him, under her breath, “Go away, go away; Amanda’s coming!” Amanda was the parlour-maid; and it was in those terms that the Twelfth Street Juliet dismissed her Brooklyn Romeo. As he wandered back into the Fifth Avenue, where the evening air was conscious of a vernal fragrance from the shrubs in the little precinct of the pretty Gothic church ornamenting that pleasant part of the street, he was too absorbed in the impression of the delightful contact from which the girl had violently released herself to reflect that the great reason she had mentioned a moment before was a reason for their marrying, of course, but not in the least a reason for their not making it public. But, as I said in the opening lines of this chapter, if he did not understand his mistress’s motives at the end, he cannot be expected to have understood them at the beginning.

#### IV

MRS. PORTICO, as we know, was always talking about going to Europe; but she had not yet—I mean a year after the incident I have just related—put her hand upon a youthful cicerone. Petticoats, of course, were required; it was necessary that her companion should be of the sex which sinks most naturally upon benches, in galleries and cathedrals, and pauses most frequently upon stair-cases that ascend to celebrated views. She was a widow with a good fortune and several sons, all of whom were in Wall Street, and none of them capable of the relaxed pace at which she expected to take her foreign tour. They were all in a state of tension; they went through life standing. She was a short, broad, high-coloured woman, with a loud voice and superabundant black hair, arranged in a way peculiar to herself, with so many combs and bands that it had the appearance of a national coiffure. There was an impression in New York, about 1845, that the style was Danish; some one had said something about having seen it in Schleswig-Holstein. Mrs. Portico had a bold, humorous, slightly flamboyant look; people who saw her for the first time received an impression that her late husband had married the daughter of a bar-keeper or the proprietress of a menagerie. Her high, hoarse, good-natured voice seemed to connect her in some way with public life;

it was not pretty enough to suggest that she might have been an actress. These ideas quickly passed away, however, even if you were not sufficiently initiated to know—as all the Gressies, for instance, knew so well—that her origin, so far from being enveloped in mystery, was almost the sort of thing she might have boasted of. But, in spite of the high pitch of her appearance, she didn't boast of anything; she was a genial, easy, comical, irreverent person, with a large charity, a democratic, fraternising turn of mind, and a contempt for many worldly standards, which she expressed not in the least in general axioms (for she had a mortal horror of philosophy), but in violent ejaculations on particular occasions. She had not a grain of moral timidity, and she fronted a delicate social problem as sturdily as she would have barred the way of a gentleman she might have met in her vestibule with the plate-chest. The only thing which prevented her being a bore in orthodox circles was that she was incapable of discussion. She never lost her temper, but she lost her vocabulary, and ended quickly by praying that heaven would give her an opportunity to act out what she believed. She was an old friend of Mr. and Mrs. Gressie, who esteemed her for the antiquity of her lineage and the frequency of her subscriptions, and to whom she rendered the service of making them feel liberal—like people too sure of their own position to be frightened. She was their indulgence, their dissipation, their point of contact with dangerous heresies; so long as they continued to see her they could not be accused of being narrow-minded—a matter as to which they were perhaps vaguely conscious of the necessity of taking their precautions. Mrs. Portico never asked herself whether she liked the Gressies; she had no disposition for morbid analysis, she accepted transmitted associations, and

## GEORGINA'S REASONS

found, somehow, that her acquaintance with these people helped her to relieve herself. She was always making scenes in their drawing-room, scenes half indignant, half jocose, like all her manifestations, to which it must be confessed that they adapted themselves beautifully. They never "met" her, in the language of controversy; but always collected to watch her, with smiles and comfortable platitudes, as if they envied her superior richness of temperament. She took an interest in Georgina, who seemed to her different from the others, with suggestions about her of being likely not to marry so unrefreshingly as her sisters had done, and of a high, bold standard of duty. Her sisters had married from duty, but Mrs. Portico would rather have chopped off one of her large plump hands than behave herself so well as that. She had, in her daughterless condition, a certain ideal of a girl who should be beautiful and romantic, with wistful eyes, and a little persecuted, so that she, Mrs. Portico, might get her out of her troubles. She looked to Georgina, to a considerable degree, to give actuality to this vision; but she had really never understood Georgina at all. She ought to have been shrewd, but she lacked this refinement, and she never understood anything until after many disappointments and vexations. It was difficult to startle her, but she was much startled by a communication that this young lady made her one fine spring morning. With her florid appearance and her speculative mind, she was probably the most innocent woman in New York.

Georgina came very early, earlier even than visits were paid in New York thirty years ago; and instantly, without any preface, looking her straight in the face, told Mrs. Portico that she was in great trouble and must appeal to her for assistance. Georgina had in her aspect no symptom of distress; she was as

## GEORGINA'S REASONS

fresh and beautiful as the April day itself ; she held up her head and smiled, with a sort of familiar challenge, looking like a young woman who would naturally be on good terms with fortune. It was not in the least in the tone of a person making a confession or relating a misadventure that she presently said, " Well, you must know, to begin with—of course, it will surprise you—that I am married."

" Married, Georgina Gressie ! " Mrs. Portico repeated, in her most resonant tones.

Georgina got up, walked with her majestic step across the room, and closed the door. Then she stood there, her back pressed against the mahogany panels, indicating only by the distance she had placed between herself and her hostess the consciousness of an irregular position. " I am not Georgina Gressie—I am Georgina Benyon ; and it has become plain, within a short time, that the natural consequence will take place."

Mrs. Portico was altogether bewildered. " The natural consequence ? " she exclaimed, staring.

" Of one's being married, of course ; I suppose you know what that is. No one must know anything about it. I want you to take me to Europe."

Mrs. Portico now slowly rose from her place and approached her visitor, looking at her from head to foot as she did so, as if to measure the truth of her remarkable announcement. She rested her hands on Georgina's shoulders a moment, gazing into her blooming face, and then she drew her closer and kissed her. In this way the girl was conducted back to the sofa, where, in a conversation of extreme intimacy, she opened Mrs. Portico's eyes wider than they had ever been opened before. She was Raymond Benyon's wife ; they had been married a year, but no one knew anything about it. She had kept it from every one, and she meant to go on keeping it.



## GEORGINA'S REASONS

The ceremony had taken place in a little Episcopal church at Haarlem, one Sunday afternoon, after the service. There was no one in that dusty suburb who knew them ; the clergyman, vexed at being detained, and wanting to go home to tea, had made no trouble ; he tied the knot before they could turn round. It was ridiculous how easy it had been. Raymond had told him frankly that it must all be under the rose, as the young lady's family disapproved of what she was doing. But she was of legal age, and perfectly free ; he could see that for himself. The parson had given a grunt as he looked at her over his spectacles ; it was not very complimentary, it seemed to say that she was indeed no chicken. Of course she looked old for a girl ; but she was not a girl now, was she ? Raymond had certified his own identity as an officer in the United States navy (he had papers, besides his uniform, which he wore), and introduced the clergyman to a friend he had brought with him, who was also in the navy, a venerable paymaster. It was he who gave Georgina away, as it were ; he was a dear old man, a regular grandmother, and perfectly safe. He had been married three times himself, and the first time in the same way. After the ceremony she went back to her father's ; but she saw Mr. Benyon the next day. After that she saw him—for a little while—pretty often. He was always begging her to come to him altogether ; she must do him that justice. But she wouldn't—she wouldn't now—perhaps she wouldn't ever. She had her reasons, which seemed to her very good but were very difficult to explain. She would tell Mrs. Portico in plenty of time what they were. But that was not the question now, whether they were good or bad ; the question was for her to get away from the country for several months—far away from any one who had ever known her. She should like to go to some little place in Spain or Italy, where she



should be out of the world until everything was over.

Mrs. Portico's heart gave a jump as this serene, handsome, domestic girl, sitting there with a hand in hers and pouring forth her extraordinary tale, spoke of everything being over. There was a glossy coldness in it, an unnatural lightness, which suggested—poor Mrs. Portico scarcely knew what. If Georgina was to become a mother it was to be supposed she would remain a mother. She said there was a beautiful place in Italy—Genoa—of which Raymond had often spoken, and where he had been more than once, he admired it so much ; couldn't they go there and be quiet for a little while ? She was asking a great favour, that she knew very well ; but if Mrs. Portico wouldn't take her she would find some one who would. They had talked of such a journey so often ; and, certainly, if Mrs. Portico had been willing before, she ought to be much more willing now. The girl declared that she *would* do something, go somewhere, keep, in one way or another, her situation unperceived. There was no use talking to her about telling ; she would rather die than tell. No doubt it seemed strange, but she knew what she was about. No one had guessed anything yet—she had succeeded perfectly in doing what she wished—and her father and mother believed—as Mrs. Portico had believed, hadn't she ?—that, any time the last year, Raymond Benyon was less to her than he had been before. Well, so he was ; yes, he was. He had gone away—he was off, goodness knew where—in the Pacific ; she was alone, and now she would remain alone. The family believed it was all over, with his going back to his ship, and other things, and they were right ; for it was over, or it would be soon.

## V

MRS. PORTICO, by this time, had grown almost afraid of her young friend ; she had so little fear, she had even, as it were, so little shame. If the good lady had been accustomed to analysing things a little more, she would have said she had so little conscience. She looked at Georgina with dilated eyes—her visitor was so much the calmer of the two—and exclaimed, and murmured, and sank back, and sprang forward, and wiped her forehead with her pocket-handkerchief. There were things she didn't understand ; that they should all have been so deceived, that they should have thought Georgina was giving her lover up (they flattered themselves she was discouraged or had grown tired of him) when she was really only making it impossible she should belong to any one else. And with this, her inconsequence, her capriciousness, her absence of motive, the way she contradicted herself, her apparent belief that she could hush up such a situation for ever ! There was nothing shameful in having married poor Mr. Benyon, even in a little church at Haarlem, and being given away by a paymaster ; it was much more shameful to be in such a state without being prepared to make the proper explanations. And she must have seen very little of her husband ; she must have given him up, so far as meeting him went, almost as soon as she had taken him. Had

## GEORGINA'S REASONS

not Mrs. Gressie herself told Mrs. Portico, in the preceding October it must have been, that there now would be no need of sending Georgina away, inasmuch as the affair with the little navy-man—a project in every way so unsuitable—had quite blown over?

“After our marriage I saw him less—I saw him a great deal less,” Georgina explained; but her explanation only appeared to make the mystery more dense.

“I don’t see, in that case, what on earth you married him for!”

“We had to be more careful; I wished to appear to have given him up. Of course we were really more intimate; I saw him differently,” Georgina said, smiling.

“I should think so! I can’t for the life of me see why you weren’t discovered.”

“All I can say is we weren’t. No doubt it’s remarkable. We managed very well—that is, I managed; he didn’t want to manage at all. And then father and mother are incredibly stupid!”

Mrs. Portico exhaled a comprehensive moan, feeling glad, on the whole, that she hadn’t a daughter, while Georgina went on to furnish a few more details. Raymond Benyon, in the summer, had been ordered from Brooklyn to Charlestown, near Boston, where, as Mrs. Portico perhaps knew, there was another navy-yard, in which there was a temporary press of work, requiring more oversight. He had remained there several months, during which he had written to her urgently to come to him, and during which, as well, he had received notice that he was to rejoin his ship a little later. Before doing so he came back to Brooklyn for a few weeks, to wind up his work there, and then she had seen him—well, pretty often. That was the best time of all the year that had elapsed since their marriage. It was a wonder at home that

## GEORGINA'S REASONS

nothing had then been guessed, because she had really been reckless, and Benyon had even tried to force on a disclosure. But they were dense, that was very certain. He had besought her again and again to put an end to their false position, but she didn't want it any more than she had wanted it before. They had had rather a bad parting; in fact, for a pair of lovers, it was a very queer parting indeed. He didn't know, now, the thing she had come to tell Mrs. Portico. She had not written to him. He was on a very long cruise. It might be two years before he returned to the United States. "I don't care how long he stays away," Georgina said, very simply.

"You haven't mentioned why you married him. Perhaps you don't remember!" Mrs. Portico broke out, with her masculine laugh.

"Oh yes; I loved him."

"And you have got over that?"

Georgina hesitated a moment. "Why, no, Mrs. Portico, of course I haven't. Raymond's a splendid fellow."

"Then why don't you live with him? You don't explain that."

"What would be the use when he's always away? How can one live with a man who spends half his life in the South Seas? If he wasn't in the navy it would be different; but to go through everything—I mean everything that making our marriage known would bring upon me: the scolding and the exposure and the ridicule, the scenes at home—to go through it all just for the idea, and yet to be alone here, just as I was before, without my husband after all, with none of the good of him"—and here Georgina looked at her hostess as if with the certitude that such an enumeration of inconveniences would touch her effectually—"really, Mrs. Portico, I am bound to

## GEORGINA'S REASONS

say I don't think that would be worth while ; I haven't the courage for it."

" I never thought you were a coward," said Mrs. Portico.

" Well, I am not, if you will give me time. I am very patient."

" I never thought that either."

" Marrying changes one," said Georgina, still smiling.

" It certainly seems to have had a very odd effect upon you. Why don't you make him leave the navy and arrange your life comfortably, like every one else ? "

" I wouldn't for the world interfere with his prospects—with his promotion. That is sure to come for him, and to come immediately, he has such talents. He is devoted to his profession ; it would ruin him to leave it."

" My dear young woman, you are a living wonder ! " Mrs. Portico exclaimed, looking at her companion as if she had been in a glass case.

" So poor Raymond says," Georgina answered, smiling more than ever.

" Certainly, I should have been very sorry to marry a navy-man ; but if I had married him I would stick to him, in the face of all the scoldings in the universe ! "

" I don't know what your parents may have been ; I know what mine are," Georgina replied, with some dignity. " When he's a captain we shall come out of hiding."

" And what shall you do meanwhile ? What will you do with your children ? Where will you hide them ? What will you do with this one ? "

Georgina rested her eyes on her lap for a minute ; then, raising them, she met those of Mrs. Portico. " Somewhere in Europe," she said, in her sweet tone.

## GEORGINA'S REASONS

"Georgina Gressie, you're a monster!" the elder lady cried.

"I know what I am about, and you will help me," the girl went on.

"I will go and tell your father and mother the whole story—that's what I will do!"

"I am not in the least afraid of that—not in the least. You will help me; I assure you that you will."

"Do you mean I will support the child?"

Georgina broke into a laugh. "I do believe you would, if I were to ask you! But I won't go so far as that; I have something of my own. All I want you to do is to be with me."

"At Genoa; yes, you have got it all fixed! You say Mr. Benyon is so fond of the place. That's all very well; but how will he like his baby being deposited there?"

"He won't like it at all. You see I tell you the whole truth," said Georgina, gently.

"Much obliged; it's a pity you keep it all for me! It is in his power, then, to make you behave properly. *He* can publish your marriage, if you won't; and if he does you will have to acknowledge your child."

"Publish, Mrs. Portico? How little you know my Raymond! He will never break a promise; he will go through fire first."

"And what have you got him to promise?"

"Never to insist on a disclosure against my will; never to claim me openly as his wife till I think it is time; never to let any one know what has passed between us if I choose to keep it still a secret—to keep it for years—to keep it for ever. Never do anything in the matter himself, but to leave it to me. For this he has given me his solemn word of honour, and I know what that means!"

Mrs. Portico, on the sofa, fairly bounced.

"You do know what you are about! And Mr. Benyon strikes me as more demented even than yourself. I never heard of a man putting his head into such a noose. What good can it do him?"

"What good? The good it did him was that it gratified me. At the time he took it he would have made any promise under the sun. It was a condition I exacted just at the very last, before the marriage took place. There was nothing at that moment he would have refused me; there was nothing I couldn't have made him do. He was in love to that degree—but I don't want to boast," said Georgina, with quiet grandeur. "He wanted—he wanted——" she added; but then she paused.

"He doesn't seem to have wanted much!" Mrs. Portico cried, in a tone which made Georgina turn to the window, as if it might have reached the street. Her hostess noticed the movement and went on, "Oh, my dear, if I ever do tell your story I will tell it so that people will hear it!"

"You never will tell it. What I mean is that Raymond wanted the sanction—of the affair at the church—because he saw that I would never do without it. Therefore, for him, the sooner we had it the better, and, to hurry it on, he was ready to take any pledge."

"You have got it pat enough," said Mrs. Portico, in homely phrase. "I don't know what you mean by sanctions, or what you wanted of 'em."

Georgina got up, holding rather higher than before that beautiful head which, in spite of the embarrassments of this interview, had not yet perceptibly abated its elevation. "Would you have liked me to—to not marry?"

Mrs. Portico rose also, and, flushed with the agitation of unwonted knowledge—it was as if she



## GEORGINA'S REASONS

had discovered a skeleton in her favourite cupboard—faced her young friend for a moment. Then her conflicting sentiments resolved themselves into an abrupt question, implying, for Mrs. Portico, much subtlety: "Georgina Gressie, were you really in love with him?"

The question suddenly dissipated the girl's strange, studied, wilful coldness; she broke out, with a quick flash of passion—a passion that, for the moment, was predominantly anger, "Why else, in heaven's name, should I have done what I have done? Why else should I have married him? What under the sun had I to gain?"

A certain quiver in Georgina's voice, a light in her eye which seemed to Mrs. Portico more spontaneous, more human, as she uttered these words, caused them to affect her hostess rather less painfully than anything she had yet said. She took the girl's hand and emitted indefinite admonitory sounds. "Help me, my dear old friend, help me," Georgina continued, in a low, pleading tone; and in a moment Mrs. Portico saw that the tears were in her eyes.

"You are a precious mixture, my child!" she exclaimed. "Go straight home to your own mother and tell her everything; that is your best help."

"You are kinder than my mother. You mustn't judge her by yourself."

"What can she do to you? How can she hurt you? We are not living in pagan times," said Mrs. Portico, who was seldom so historical. "Besides, you have no reason to speak of your mother—to think of her even—so! She would have liked you to marry a man of some property; but she has always been a good mother to you."

At this rebuke Georgina suddenly kindled again; she was, indeed, as Mrs. Portico had said, a precious mixture. Conscious, evidently, that she could not

## GEORGINA'S REASONS

satisfactorily justify her present stiffness, she wheeled round upon a grievance which absolved her from self-defence. "Why, then, did he make that promise, if he loved me? No man who really loved me would have made it, and no man that was a man as I understand being a man! He might have seen that I only did it to test him—to see if he wanted to take advantage of being left free himself. It is a proof that he doesn't love me—not as he ought to have done; and in such a case as that a woman isn't bound to make sacrifices!"

Mrs. Portico was not a person of a nimble intellect; her mind moved vigorously, but heavily; yet she sometimes made happy guesses. She saw that Georgina's emotions were partly real and partly fictitious, that, as regards this last matter especially, she was trying to "get up" a resentment, in order to excuse herself. The pretext was absurd, and the good lady was struck with its being heartless on the part of her young visitor to reproach poor Benyon with a concession on which she had insisted, and which could only be a proof of his devotion, inasmuch as he left her free while he bound himself. Altogether, Mrs. Portico was shocked and dismayed at such a want of simplicity in the behaviour of a young person whom she had hitherto believed to be as candid as she was stylish, and her appreciation of this discovery expressed itself in the uncompromising remark, "You strike me as a very bad girl, my dear; you strike me as a very bad girl!"

## VI

It will doubtless seem to the reader very singular that, in spite of this reflexion, which appeared to sum up her judgement of the matter, Mrs. Portico should in the course of a very few days have consented to everything that Georgina asked of her. I have thought it well to narrate at length the first conversation that took place between them, but I shall not trace further the successive phases of the girl's appeal, or the steps by which—in the face of a hundred robust and salutary convictions—the loud, kind, sharp, simple, sceptical, credulous woman took under her protection a damsel whose obstinacy she could not speak of without getting red with anger. It was the simple fact of Georgina's personal condition that moved her ; this young lady's greatest eloquence was the seriousness of her predicament. She might be bad, and she had a splendid, careless, insolent, fair-faced way of admitting it, which at moments, incoherently, inconsistently, irresistibly, transmuted the cynical confession into tears of weakness ; but Mrs. Portico had known her from her rosiest years, and when Georgina declared that she couldn't go home, that she wished to be with her and not with her mother, that she couldn't expose herself—she absolutely couldn't—and that she must remain with her and her only till the day they should sail, the poor lady was forced to make that day a reality. She

## GEORGINA'S REASONS

was over-mastered, she was cajoled, she was, to a certain extent, fascinated. She had to accept Georgina's rigidity (she had none of her own to oppose to it—she was only violent, she was not continuous), and once she did this it was plain, after all, that to take her young friend to Europe was to help her, and to leave her alone was not to help her. Georgina literally frightened Mrs. Portico into compliance. She was evidently capable of strange things if thrown upon her own devices. So, from one day to another, Mrs. Portico announced that she was really at last about to sail for foreign lands (her doctor having told her that if she didn't look out she would get too old to enjoy them), and that she had invited that robust Miss Gressie, who could stand so long on her feet, to accompany her. There was joy in the house of Gressie at this announcement, for, though the danger was over, it was a great general advantage to Georgina to go, and the Gressies were always elated at the prospect of an advantage. There was a danger that she might meet Mr. Benyon on the other side of the world ; but it didn't seem likely that Mrs. Portico would lend herself to a plot of that kind. If she had taken it into her head to favour their love-affair she would have done it openly, and Georgina would have been married by this time. Her arrangements were made as quickly as her decision had been—or rather had appeared—slow ; for this concerned those mercurial young men down town. Georgina was perpetually at her house ; it was understood in Twelfth Street that she was talking over her future travels with her kind friend. Talk there was, of course, to a considerable degree ; but after it was settled they should start nothing more was said about the motive of the journey. Nothing was said, that is, till the night before they sailed ; then a few plain words passed between them. Georgina had already taken leave of

## GEORGINA'S REASONS

her relations in Twelfth Street, and was to sleep at Mrs. Portico's in order to go down to the ship at an early hour. The two ladies were sitting together in the firelight, silent with the consciousness of corded luggage, when the elder one suddenly remarked to her companion that she seemed to be taking a great deal upon herself in assuming that Raymond Benyon wouldn't force her hand. He might choose to acknowledge his child, if she didn't; there were promises and promises, and many people would consider they had been let off when circumstances were so altered. She would have to reckon with Mr. Benyon more than she thought.

"I know what I am about," Georgina answered. "There is only one promise for him. I don't know what you mean by circumstances being altered."

"Everything seems to me to be altered," poor Mrs. Portico murmured, rather tragically.

"Well, he isn't, and he never will! I am sure of him, as sure as that I sit here. Do you think I would have looked at him if I hadn't known he was a man of his word?"

"You have chosen him well, my dear," said Mrs. Portico, who by this time was reduced to a kind of bewildered acquiescence.

"Of course I have chosen him well. In such a matter as this he will be perfectly splendid." Then suddenly, "Perfectly splendid, that's why I cared for him," she repeated, with a flash of incongruous passion.

This seemed to Mrs. Portico audacious to the point of being sublime; but she had given up trying to understand anything that the girl might say or do. She understood less and less after they had disembarked in England and begun to travel southward; and she understood least of all when, in the middle of the winter, the event came off with which in

imagination she had tried to familiarise herself, but which, when it occurred, seemed to her beyond measure strange and dreadful. It took place at Genoa ; for Georgina had made up her mind that there would be more privacy in a big town than in a little ; and she wrote to America that both Mrs. Portico and she had fallen in love with the place and would spend two or three months there. At that time people in the United States knew much less than to-day about the comparative attractions of foreign cities ; and it was not thought surprising that absent New Yorkers should wish to linger in a seaport where they might find apartments, according to Georgina's report, in a palace painted in fresco by Vandyke and Titian. Georgina, in her letters, omitted, it will be seen, no detail that could give colour to Mrs. Portico's long stay at Genoa. In such a palace—where the travellers hired twenty gilded rooms for the most insignificant sum—a remarkably fine boy came into the world. Nothing could have been more successful and comfortable than this transaction—Mrs. Portico was almost appalled at the facility and felicity of it. She was by this time in a pretty bad way ; and—what had never happened to her before in her life—she suffered from chronic depression of spirits. She hated to have to lie, and now she was lying all the time. Everything she wrote home, everything that had been said or done in connexion with their stay in Genoa, was a lie. The way they remained indoors to avoid meeting chance compatriots was a lie. Compatriots in Genoa, at that period, were very rare ; but nothing could exceed the business-like completeness of Georgina's precautions. Her nerve, her self-possession, her apparent want of feeling, excited on Mrs. Portico's part a kind of gloomy suspense ; a morbid anxiety to see how far her companion would go took possession of the excellent woman who, a few months before,

## GEORGINA'S REASONS

hated to fix her mind on disagreeable things. Georgina went very far indeed ; she did everything in her power to dissimulate the origin of her child. The record of his birth was made under a false name, and he was baptized at the nearest church by a Catholic priest. A magnificent contadina was brought to light by the doctor in a village in the hills, and this big, brown, barbarous creature, who, to do her justice, was full of handsome, familiar smiles and coarse tenderness, was constituted nurse to Raymond Benyon's son. She nursed him for a fortnight under the mother's eye, and she was then sent back to her village with the baby in her arms and sundry gold coin knotted into a corner of her pocket-handkerchief. Mr. Gressie had given his daughter a liberal letter of credit on a London banker, and she was able, for the present, to make abundant provision for the little one. She called Mrs. Portico's attention to the fact that she spent none of her money on futilities ; she kept it all for her small pensioner in the Genoese hills. Mrs. Portico beheld these strange doings with a stupefaction that occasionally broke into passionate protest ; then she relapsed into a brooding sense of having now been an accomplice so far that she must be an accomplice to the end.



## VII

THE two ladies went down to Rome—Georgina was in wonderful trim—to finish the season, and here Mrs. Portico became convinced that she intended to abandon her offspring. She had not driven into the country to see the nursling before leaving Genoa ; she had said that she couldn't bear to see it in such a place and among such people. Mrs. Portico, it must be added, had felt the force of this plea, felt it as regards a plan of her own, given up after being hotly entertained for a few hours, of devoting a day, by herself, to a visit to the big contadina. It seemed to her that if she should see the child in the sordid hands to which Georgina had consigned it, she would become still more of a participant than she was already. This young woman's blooming hardness, after they got to Rome, acted upon her like a kind of Medusa-mask. She had seen a horrible thing, she had been mixed up with it, and her motherly heart had received a mortal chill. It became more clear to her every day that, though Georgina would continue to send the infant money in considerable quantities, she had dispossessed herself of it for ever. Together with this induction a fixed idea settled in her mind—the project of taking the baby herself, of making him her own, of arranging that matter with the father. The countenance she had given Georgina up to this point was an effective pledge that she would not expose her ; but she could adopt the poor little mortal without exposing her, she could say that he was a

lovely baby—he was lovely, fortunately—whom she had picked up in a wretched village in Italy, a village that had been devastated by brigands. She could pretend—she could pretend ; oh yes, of course, she could pretend ! Everything was imposture now, and she could go on to lie as she had begun. The falsity of the whole business sickened her ; it made her so yellow that she scarcely knew herself in her glass. None the less, to rescue the child, even if she had to become falser still, would be in some measure an atonement for the treachery to which she had already surrendered herself. She began to hate Georgina, who had dragged her into such an abyss, and if it had not been for two considerations she would have insisted on their separating. One was the deference she owed to Mr. and Mrs. Gressie, who had reposed such a trust in her ; the other was that she must keep hold of the mother till she had got possession of the infant. Meanwhile, in this forced communion, her detestation of her companion increased ; Georgina came to appear to her a creature of clay and iron. She was exceedingly afraid of her, and it seemed to her now a wonder of wonders that she should ever have trusted her enough to come so far. Georgina showed no consciousness of the change in Mrs. Portico, though there was, indeed, at present, not even a pretence of confidence between the two. Miss Gressie—that was another lie to which Mrs. Portico had to lend herself—was bent on enjoying Europe, and was especially delighted with Rome. She certainly had the courage of her undertaking, and she confessed to Mrs. Portico that she had left Raymond Benyon, and meant to continue to leave him, in ignorance of what had taken place at Genoa. There was a certain confidence, it must be said, in that. He was now in Chinese waters, and she probably should not see him for years. Mrs. Portico took counsel with herself,

## GEORGINA'S REASONS

and the result of her cogitation was that she wrote to Mr. Benyon that a charming little boy had been born to him, and that Georgina had put him to nurse with Italian peasants ; but that, if he would kindly consent to it, she, Mrs. Portico, would bring him up much better than that. She knew not how to address her letter, and Georgina, even if she should know, which was doubtful, would never tell her ; so she sent the missive to the care of the Secretary of the Navy, at Washington, with an earnest request that it might immediately be forwarded. Such was Mrs. Portico's last effort in this strange business of Georgina's. I relate rather a complicated fact in a very few words when I say that the poor lady's anxieties, indignations, repentances, preyed upon her until they fairly broke her down. Various persons whom she knew in Rome notified her that the air of the Seven Hills was plainly unfavourable to her ; and she had made up her mind to return to her native land when she found that, in her depressed condition, malarial fever had laid its hand upon her. She was unable to move, and the matter was settled for her in the course of an illness which, happily, was not prolonged. I have said that she was not obstinate, and the resistance she made on the present occasion was not worthy even of her spasmodic energy. Brain-fever made its appearance, and she died at the end of three weeks, during which Georgina's attentions to her patient and protectress had been unremitting. There were other Americans in Rome who, after this sad event, extended to the bereaved young lady every comfort and hospitality. She had no lack of opportunities for returning under a proper escort to New York. She selected, you may be sure, the best, and re-entered her father's house, where she took to plain dressing ; for she sent all her pocket-money, with the utmost secrecy, to the little boy in the Genoese hills.

## VIII

"WHY should he come if he doesn't like you? He is under no obligation, and he has his ship to look after. Why should he sit for an hour at a time, and why should he be so pleasant?"

"Do you think he is very pleasant?" Kate Theory asked, turning away her face from her sister. It was important that Mildred should not see how little the expression of that charming countenance corresponded with the inquiry.

This precaution was useless, however, for in a moment Mildred said, from the delicately draped couch on which she lay at the open window, "Kate Theory, don't be affected."

"Perhaps it's for you he comes. I don't see why he shouldn't; you are far more attractive than I, and you have a great deal more to say. How can he help seeing that you are the cleverest of the clever? You can talk to him of everything: of the dates of the different eruptions, of the statues and bronzes in the museum, which you have never seen, *poverina*, but which you know more about than he does, than any one does. What was it you began on last time? Oh yes, you poured forth floods about Magna Græcia. And then—and then——"

But with this Kate Theory paused; she felt it wouldn't do to speak the words that had risen to her lips. That her sister was as beautiful as a saint,

## GEORGINA'S REASONS

and as delicate and refined as an angel—she had been on the point of saying something of that sort. But Mildred's beauty and delicacy were the fairness of mortal disease, and to praise her for her refinement was just to remind her that she had the tenuity of a consumptive. So, after she had checked herself, the younger girl—she was younger only by a year or two—simply kissed her tenderly and settled the knot of the lace handkerchief that was tied over her head. Mildred knew what she had been going to say, knew why she had stopped. Mildred knew everything, without ever leaving her room, or leaving, at least, that little *salon* of their own, at the pension, which she had made so pretty by simply lying there, at the window that had the view of the bay and of Vesuvius, and telling Kate how to arrange and how to rearrange everything. Since it began to be plain that Mildred must spend her small remnant of years altogether in warm climates, the lot of the two sisters had been cast in the ungarnished hostelries of southern Europe. Their little sitting-room was sure to be very ugly, and Mildred was never happy till it was remodelled. Her sister fell to work, as a matter of course, the first day, and changed the place of all the tables, sofas, chairs, till every combination had been tried and the invalid thought at last that there was a little effect.

Kate Theory had a taste of her own, and her ideas were not always the same as her sister's ; but she did whatever Mildred liked, and if the poor girl had told her to put the door-mat on the dining-table, or the clock under the sofa, she would have obeyed without a murmur. Her own ideas, her personal tastes, had been folded up and put away, like garments out of season, in drawers and trunks, with camphor and lavender. They were not, as a general thing, for southern wear, however indispensable to comfort

## GEORGINA'S REASONS

in the climate of New England, where poor Mildred had lost her health. Kate Theory, ever since this event, had lived for her companion, and it was almost an inconvenience for her to think that she was attractive to Captain Benyon. It was as if she had shut up her house and was not in a position to entertain. So long as Mildred should live, her own life was suspended ; if there should be any time afterwards, perhaps she would take it up again ; but for the present, in answer to any knock at her door, she could only call down from one of her dusty windows that she was not at home. Was it really in these terms she should have to dismiss Captain Benyon ? If Mildred said it was for her he came she must perhaps take upon herself such a duty ; for, as we have seen, Mildred knew everything, and she must therefore be right. She knew about the statues in the museum, about the excavations at Pompeii, about the antique splendour of Magna Græcia. She always had some instructive volume on the table beside her sofa, and she had strength enough to hold the book for half an hour at a time. That was about the only strength she had now. The Neapolitan winter had been remarkably soft, but after the first month or two she had been obliged to give up her little walks in the garden. It lay beneath her window like a single enormous bouquet ; as early as May, that year, the flowers were so dense. None of them, however, had a colour so intense as the splendid blue of the bay, which filled up all the rest of the view. It would have looked painted if you had not been able to see the little movement of the waves. Mildred Theory watched them by the hour, and the breathing crest of the volcano, on the other side of Naples, and the great sea-vision of Capri, on the horizon, changing its tint while her eyes rested there, and wondered what would become of her sister after she was gone.



## GEORGINA'S REASONS

Now that Percival was married—he was their only brother, and from one day to the other was to come down to Naples to show them his new wife, as yet a complete stranger, or revealed only in the few letters she had written them during her wedding-tour—now that Percival was to be quite taken up, poor Kate's situation would be much more grave. Mildred felt that she should be able to judge better after she should have seen her sister-in-law how much of a home Kate might expect to find with the pair ; but even if Agnes should prove—well, more satisfactory than her letters, it was a wretched prospect for Kate—this living as a mere appendage to happier people. Maiden-aunts were very well, but being a maiden-aunt was only a last resource, and Kate's first resources had not even been tried.

Meanwhile the latter young lady wondered as well, wondered in what book Mildred had read that Captain Benyon was in love with her. She admired him, she thought, but he didn't seem a man that would fall in love with one like that. She could see that he was on his guard : he wouldn't throw himself away. He thought too much of himself, or at any rate he took too good care of himself, in the manner of a man to whom something had happened which had given him a lesson. Of course what had happened was that his heart was buried somewhere, in some woman's grave ; he had loved some beautiful girl—much more beautiful, Kate was sure, than she, who thought herself meagre and dusky—and the maiden had died, and his capacity to love had died with her. He loved her memory ; that was the only thing he would care for now. He was quiet, gentle, clever, humorous, and very kind in his manner ; but if any one save Mildred had said to her that if he came three times a week to Posilippo, it was for anything but to pass his time (he had told them he didn't know



another lady in Naples), she would have felt that this was simply the kind of thing—usually so idiotic—that people always thought it necessary to say. It was very easy for him to come ; he had the big ship's boat, with nothing else to do ; and what could be more delightful than to be rowed across the bay, under a bright awning, by four brown sailors with *Louisiana* in blue letters on their immaculate white shirts and in gilt letters on their fluttering hat-ribbons ? The boat came to the steps of the garden of the pension, where the orange-trees hung over and made vague yellow balls shine back out of the water. Kate Theory knew all about that, for Captain Benyon had persuaded her to take a turn in the boat, and if they had only had another lady to go with them he could have conveyed her to the ship and shown her all over it. It looked beautiful, just a little way off, with the American flag hanging loose in the Italian air. They would have another lady when Agnes should arrive ; then Percival would remain with Mildred while they took this excursion. Mildred had stayed alone the day she went in the boat ; she had insisted on it, and of course it was really Mildred who had persuaded her ; though now that Kate came to think of it, Captain Benyon had, in his quiet, waiting way—he turned out to be waiting long after you thought he had let a thing pass—said a good deal about the pleasure it would give him. Of course, everything would give pleasure to a man who was so bored. He was keeping the *Louisiana* at Naples, week after week, simply because these were the commodore's orders. There was no work to be done there, and his time was on his hands ; but of course the commodore, who had gone to Constantinople with the two other ships, had to be obeyed to the letter, however mysterious his motives. It made no difference that he was a fantastic, grumbling, arbitrary old com-

## GEORGINA'S REASONS

modore ; only a good while afterwards it occurred to Kate Theory that, for a reserved, correct man, Captain Benyon had given her a considerable proof of confidence in speaking to her in these terms of his superior officer. If he looked at all hot when he arrived at the pension she offered him a glass of cold "orangeade." Mildred thought this an unpleasant drink—she called it messy ; but Kate adored it and Captain Benyon always accepted it.

## IX

THE day I speak of, to change the subject, she called her sister's attention to the extraordinary sharpness of a zigzagging cloud-shadow on the tinted slope of Vesuvius ; but Mildred remarked in answer only that she wished her sister would marry the Captain. It was in this familiar way that constant meditation led Miss Theory to speak of him ; it shows how constantly she thought of him, for, in general, no one was more ceremonious than she, and the failure of her health had not caused her to relax any form that it was possible to keep up. There was a kind of slim erectness even in the way she lay on her sofa ; and she always received the doctor as if he were calling for the first time.

" I had better wait till he asks me," Kate Theory said. " Dear Milly, if I were to do some of the things you wish me to do, I should shock you very much."

" I wish he would marry you, then. You know there is very little time, if I wish to see it."

" You will never see it, Mildred. I don't see why you should take so for granted that I would accept him."

" You will never meet a man who has so few disagreeable qualities. He is probably not very well off. I don't know what is the pay of a captain in the navy——"

"It's a relief to find there is something you don't know," Kate Theory broke in.

"But when I am gone," her sister went on, calmly, "when I am gone there will be plenty for both of you."

The younger girl, at this, was silent for a moment ; then she exclaimed, "Mildred, you may be out of health, but I don't see why you should be dreadful !"

"You know that since we have been leading this life we have seen no one we liked better," said Milly. When she spoke of the life they were leading—there was always a soft resignation of regret and contempt in the allusion—she meant the southern winters, the foreign climates, the vain experiments, the lonely waitings, the wasted hours, the interminable rains, the bad food, the pottering, humbugging doctors, the damp pensions, the chance encounters, the fitful apparitions of fellow-travellers.

"Why shouldn't you speak for yourself alone ? I am glad you like him, Mildred."

"If you don't like him, why do you give him orangeade ?"

At this inquiry Kate began to laugh, and her sister continued—

"Of course you are glad I like him, my dear. If I didn't like him, and you did, it wouldn't be satisfactory at all. I can imagine nothing more miserable ; I shouldn't die in any sort of comfort."

Kate Theory usually checked this sort of allusion—she was always too late—with a kiss ; but on this occasion she added that it was a long time since Mildred had tormented her so much as she had done to-day. "You will make me hate him," she added.

"Well, that proves you don't already," Milly rejoined ; and it happened that almost at this moment they saw, in the golden afternoon, Captain Benyon's boat approaching the steps at the end of

the garden. He came that day, and he came two days later, and he came yet once again after an interval equally brief, before Percival Theory arrived with Mrs. Theory from Rome. He seemed anxious to crowd into these few days, as he would have said, a good deal of intercourse with the two remarkably nice girls—or nice women, he hardly knew which to call them—whom in the course of a long, idle, rather tedious detention at Naples, he had discovered in the lovely suburb of Posilippo. It was the American consul who had put him into relation with them. The sisters had had to sign in the consul's presence some law-papers, transmitted to them by the man of business who looked after their little property in America, and the kindly functionary, taking advantage of the pretext (Captain Benyon happened to come into the consulate as he was starting, indulgently, to wait upon the ladies) to bring together "two parties" who, as he said, ought to appreciate each other, proposed to his fellow-officer in the service of the United States that he should go with him as witness of the little ceremony. He might, of course, take his clerk, but the Captain would do much better; and he represented to Benyon that the Miss Theorlys (singular name, wasn't it?) suffered, he was sure, from a lack of society; also that one of them was very sick, that they were real pleasant and extraordinarily refined, and that the sight of a compatriot literally draped, as it were, in the national banner would cheer them up more than most anything, and give them a sense of protection. They had talked to the consul about Benyon's ship, which they could see from their windows, in the distance, at its anchorage. They were the only American ladies then at Naples—the only residents, at least—and the Captain wouldn't be doing the polite thing unless he went to pay them his respects. Benyon felt afresh how little it was in

his line to call upon strange women ; he was not in the habit of hunting up female acquaintance, or of looking out for the particular emotions which the sex only can inspire. He had his reasons for this abstention, and he seldom relaxed it ; but the consul appealed to him on rather strong grounds. And he suffered himself to be persuaded. He was far from regretting, during the first weeks at least, an act which was distinctly inconsistent with his great rule—that of never exposing himself to the danger of becoming entangled with an unmarried woman. He had been obliged to make this rule, and had adhered to it with some success. He was fond of women, but he was forced to restrict himself to superficial sentiments. There was no use tumbling into situations from which the only possible issue was a retreat. The step he had taken with regard to poor Miss Theory and her delightful little sister was an exception on which at first he could only congratulate himself. That had been a happy idea of the ruminating old consul ; it made Captain Benyon forgive him his hat, his boots, his shirt-front—a costume which might be considered representative, and the effect of which was to make the observer turn with rapture to a half-naked lazzarone. On either side the acquaintance had helped the time to pass, and the hours he spent at the little pension at Posilippo left a sweet, and by no means innutritive, taste behind.

As the weeks went by his exception had grown to look a good deal like a rule ; but he was able to remind himself that the path of retreat was always open to him. Moreover, if he should fall in love with the younger girl there would be no great harm, for Kate Theory was in love with her sister, and it would matter very little to her whether he advanced or retreated. She was very attractive, or rather she was very attracting. Small, pale, attentive without

rigidity, full of pretty curves and quick movements, she looked as if the habit of watching and serving had taken complete possession of her, and was literally a little sister of charity. Her thick black hair was pushed behind her ears, as if to help her to listen, and her clear brown eyes had the smile of a person too full of tact to carry a sad face to a sick-bed. She spoke in an encouraging voice, and had soothing and unselfish habits. She was very pretty, producing a cheerful effect of contrasted black and white, and dressed herself daintily, so that Mildred might have something agreeable to look at. Benyon very soon perceived that there was a fund of good service in her. Her sister had it all now ; but poor Miss Theory was fading fast, and then what would become of this precious little force ? The answer to such a question that seemed most to the point was that it was none of his business. He was not sick—-at least not physically—and he was not looking out for a nurse. Such a companion might be a luxury, but was not, as yet, a necessity. The welcome of the two ladies, at first, had been simple, and he scarcely knew what to call it but sweet ; a bright, gentle, jocular friendliness remained the tone of their intercourse. They evidently liked him to come ; they liked to see his big transatlantic ship hover about those gleaming coasts of exile. The fact of Miss Mildred being always stretched on her couch—-in his successive visits to foreign waters Benyon had not unlearned (as why should he ?) the pleasant American habit of using the lady's personal name—made their intimacy seem greater, their differences less ; it was as if his hostesses had taken him into their confidence and he had been—as the consul would have said—of the same party. Knocking about the salt parts of the globe, with a few feet square on a rolling frigate for his only home, the pretty flower-decked sitting-room of the quiet



American sisters became, more than anything he had hitherto known, his interior. He had dreamed once of having an interior, but the dream had vanished in lurid smoke, and no such vision had come to him again. He had a feeling that the end of this was drawing nigh; he was sure that the advent of the strange brother, whose wife was certain to be disagreeable, would make a difference. That is why, as I have said, he came as often as possible the last week, after he had learned the day on which Percival Theory would arrive. The limits of the exception had been reached.

He had been new to the young ladies at Posilippo, and there was no reason why they should say to each other that he was a very different man from the ingenuous youth who, ten years before, used to wander with Georgina Gressie down vistas of plank-fences brushed over with advertisements of quack medicines. It was natural he should be, and we, who know him, would have found that he had traversed the whole scale of alteration. There was nothing ingenuous in him now; he had the look of experience, of having been seasoned and hardened by the years. His face, his complexion, were the same; still smooth-shaven and slim, he always passed, at first, for a decidedly youthful mariner. But his expression was old, and his talk was older still—the talk of a man who had seen much of the world (as indeed he had to-day) and judged most things for himself, with a humorous scepticism which, whatever concessions it might make, superficially, for the sake of not offending, for instance, two remarkably nice American women who had kept most of their illusions, left you with the conviction that the next minute it would go quickly back to its own standpoint. There was a curious contradiction in him; he struck you as serious, and yet he could not be said to take things seriously. This was what

## GEORGINA'S REASONS

made Kate Theory feel so sure that he had lost the object of his affections ; and she said to herself that it must have been under circumstances of peculiar sadness, for that was, after all, a frequent accident, and was not usually thought, in itself, a sufficient stroke to make a man a cynic. This reflexion, it may be added, was, on the young lady's part, just the least bit acrimonious. Captain Benyon was not a cynic in any sense in which he might have shocked an innocent mind ; he kept his cynicism to himself, and was a very clever, courteous, attentive gentleman. If he was melancholy, you knew it chiefly by his jokes, for they were usually at his own expense ; and if he was indifferent, it was all the more to his credit that he should have exerted himself to entertain his countrywomen.

## X

THE last time he called before the arrival of the expected brother he found Miss Theory alone, and sitting up, for a wonder, at her window. Kate had driven into Naples to give orders at the hotel for the reception of the travellers, who required accommodation more spacious than the villa at Posilippo (where the two sisters had the best rooms) could offer them ; and the sick girl had taken advantage of her absence, and of the pretext afforded by a day of delicious warmth, to transfer herself for the first time in six months to an arm-chair. She was practising, as she said, for the long carriage-journey to the north, where, in a quiet corner they knew of, on the Lago Maggiore, her summer was to be spent. Raymond Benyon remarked to her that she had evidently turned the corner and was going to get well, and this gave her a chance to say various things that were on her mind. She had various things on her mind, poor Mildred Theory, so caged and restless, and yet so resigned and patient as she was ; with a clear, quick spirit, in the most perfect health, ever reaching forward, to the end of its tense little chain, from her wasted and suffering body ; and, in the course of the perfect summer afternoon, as she sat there, exhilarated by the success of her effort to get up and by her comfortable opportunity, she took her friendly visitor into the confidence of most of her anxieties.

She told him, very promptly and positively, that she was not going to get well at all, that she had probably not more than a twelvemonth yet to live, and that he would oblige her very much by not forcing her to waste any more breath in contradicting him on that head. Of course she couldn't talk much; therefore she wished to say to him only things that he would not hear from any one else. Such for instance was her present secret—Katie's and hers—the secret of their fearing so much that they shouldn't like Percival's wife, who was not from Boston but from New York. Naturally, that by itself would be nothing, but from what they had heard of her set—this subject had been explored by their correspondents—they were rather nervous, nervous to the point of not being in the least reassured by the fact that the young lady would bring Percival a fortune. The fortune was a matter of course, for that was just what they had heard about Agnes's circle—that the stamp of money was on all their thoughts and doings. They were very rich and very new and very splashing, and evidently had very little in common with the two Miss Theorys, who, moreover, if the truth must be told (and this was a great secret), did not care much for the letters their sister-in-law had hitherto addressed them. She had been at a French boarding-school in New York, and yet (and this was the greatest secret of all) she wrote to them that she had performed a part of the journey through France in a "diligance"! Of course, they would see the next day; Miss Mildred was sure she should know in a moment whether Agnes would like them. She could never have told him all this if her sister had been there, and Captain Benyon must promise never to tell Kate how she had chattered. Kate thought always that they must hide everything, and that even if Agnes should be a dreadful disappointment they must never let

## GEORGINA'S REASONS

any one guess it. And yet Kate was just the one who would suffer, in the coming years, after she herself had gone. Their brother had been everything to them, but now it would all be different. Of course it was not to be expected that he should have remained a bachelor for their sake : she only wished he had waited till she was dead and Kate was married. One of these events, it was true, was much less sure than the other ; Kate might never marry, much as she wished she would. She was quite morbidly unselfish, and didn't think she had a right to have anything of her own—not even a husband.

Miss Mildred talked a good while about Kate, and it never occurred to her that she might bore Captain Benyon. She didn't, in point of fact ; he had none of the trouble of wondering why this poor, sick, worried lady was trying to push her sister down his throat. Their peculiar situation made everything natural, and the tone she took with him now seemed only what their pleasant relations for the last three months led up to. Moreover, he had an excellent reason for not being bored : the fact, namely, that, after all, with regard to her sister, Miss Mildred appeared to him to keep back more than she uttered. She didn't tell him the great thing—she had nothing to say as to what that charming girl thought of Raymond Benyon. The effect of their interview, indeed, was to make him shrink from knowing, and he felt that the right thing for him would be to get back into his boat, which was waiting at the garden-steps, before Kate Theory should return from Naples. It came over him, as he sat there, that he was far too interested in knowing what this young lady thought of him. She might think what she pleased ; it could make no difference to him. The best opinion in the world—if it looked out at him from her tender eyes—would not make him a whit more free or more happy.

## GEORGINA'S REASONS

Women of that sort were not for him, women whom one could not see familiarly without falling in love with them, and whom it was no use to fall in love with unless one was ready to marry them. The light of the summer afternoon, and of Miss Mildred's pure spirit, seemed suddenly to flood the whole subject. He saw that he was in danger, and he had long since made up his mind that from this particular peril it was not only necessary but honourable to flee. He took leave of his hostess before her sister reappeared, and had the courage even to say to her that he should not come back often after that ; they would be so much occupied by their brother and his wife ! As he moved across the glassy bay, to the rhythm of the oars, he wished either that the sisters would leave Naples or that his confounded commodore would send for him.

When Kate returned from her errand, ten minutes later, Milly told her of the Captain's visit, and added that she had never seen anything so sudden as the way he left her. "He wouldn't wait for you, my dear, and he said he thought it more than likely that he should never see us again. It is as if he thought you were going to die too !"

"Is his ship called away ?" Kate Theory asked.

"He didn't tell me so ; he said we should be so busy with Percival and Agnes."

"He has got tired of us ; that is all. There is nothing wonderful in that ; I knew he would."

Mildred said nothing for a moment ; she was watching her sister, who was very attentively arranging some flowers. "Yes, of course, we are very dull, and he is like everybody else."

"I thought you thought he was so wonderful," said Kate—"and so fond of us."

"So he is ; I am surer of that than ever. That's why he went away so abruptly."

## GEORGINA'S REASONS

Kate looked at her sister now. "I don't understand."

"Neither do I, *cara*. But you will, one of these days."

"How, if he never comes back?"

"Oh, he will—after a while—when I am gone. Then he will explain; that, at least, is clear to me."

"My poor precious, as if I cared!" Kate Theory exclaimed, smiling as she distributed her flowers. She carried them to the window, to place them near her sister, and here she paused a moment, her eye caught by an object, far out in the bay, with which she was not unfamiliar. Mildred noticed its momentary look, and followed its direction.

"It's the Captain's gig going back to the ship," Milly said. "It's so still one can almost hear the oars."

Kate Theory turned away, with a sudden, strange violence, a movement and exclamation which, the very next minute, as she became conscious of what she had said—and, still more, of what she felt—smote her own heart (as it flushed her face) with surprise and with the force of a revelation. "I wish it would sink him to the bottom of the sea!"

Her sister stared, then caught her by the dress, as she passed from her, drawing her back with a weak hand. "Oh, my darling dear!" And she drew Kate down and down toward her, so that the girl had nothing for it but to sink on her knees and bury her face in Mildred's lap. If that ingenious invalid did not know everything now, she knew a great deal.



## XI

MRS. PERCIVAL proved very pretty ; it is more gracious to begin with this declaration, instead of saying, in the first place, that she proved very vapid. It took a long day to arrive at the end of her silliness, and the two ladies at Posilippo, even after a week had passed, suspected that they had only skirted its edges. Kate Theory had not spent half an hour in her company before she gave a little private sigh of relief ; she felt that a situation which had promised to be embarrassing was now quite clear, was even of a primitive simplicity. She would spend with her sister-in-law, in the coming time, one week in the year ; that was all that would be mortally possible. It was a blessing that one could see exactly what she was, for in that way the question settled itself. It would have been much more tiresome if Agnes had been a little less obvious ; then one would have had to hesitate and consider and weigh one thing against another. She was pretty and silly, as distinctly as an orange is yellow and round ; and Kate Theory would as soon have thought of looking to her to give interest to the future as she would have thought of looking to an orange to impart solidity to the prospect of dinner. Mrs. Percival travelled in the hope of meeting her American acquaintance, or of making acquaintance with such Americans as she did meet, and for the purpose of buying mementoes for her

## GEORGINA'S REASONS

relations. She was perpetually adding to her store of articles in tortoise-shell, in mother-of-pearl, in olive-wood, in ivory, in filigree, in tartan lacquer, in mosaic; and she had a collection of Roman scarfs and Venetian beads which she looked over exhaustively every night before she went to bed. Her conversation bore mainly upon the manner in which she intended to dispose of these accumulations. She was constantly changing about, among each other, the persons to whom they were respectively to be offered. At Rome one of the first things she said to her husband after entering the Coliseum had been, "I guess I will give the ivory work-box to Bessie and the Roman pearls to Aunt Harriet!" She was always hanging over the travellers' book at the hotel; she had it brought up to her, with a cup of chocolate, as soon as she arrived. She searched its pages for the magical name of New York, and she indulged in infinite conjecture as to who the people were—the name was sometimes only a partial cue—who had inscribed it there. What she most missed in Europe, and what she most enjoyed, was the New Yorkers; when she met them she talked about the people in their native city who had "moved" and the streets they had moved to. "Oh yes, the Drapers are going up town, to Twenty-fourth Street, and the Vanderdeckens are going to be in Twenty-third Street, right back of them. My uncle, Mr. Henry Platt, thinks of building round there." Mrs. Percival Theory was capable of repeating statements like these thirty times over—of lingering on them for hours. She talked largely of herself, of her uncles and aunts, of her clothes—past, present and future. These articles, in especial, filled her horizon; she considered them with a complacency which might have led you to suppose that she had invented the custom of draping the human form. Her main point of contact with Naples was the

purchase of coral ; and all the while she was there the word " set "—she used it as if every one would understand—fell with its little flat, common sound upon the ears of her sisters-in-law, who had no sets of anything. She cared little for pictures and mountains ; Alps and Apennines were not productive of New Yorkers, and it was difficult to take an interest in Madonnas who flourished at periods when apparently there were no fashions, or at any rate no trimmings.

I speak here not only of the impression she made upon her husband's anxious sisters, but of the judgment passed on her (he went so far as that, though it was not obvious how it mattered to him) by Raymond Benyon. And this brings me at a jump (I confess it's a very small one) to the fact that he did, after all, go back to Posilippo. He stayed away for nine days, and at the end of this time Percival Theory called upon him to thank him for the civility he had shown his kinswomen. He went to this gentleman's hotel, to return his visit, and there he found Miss Kate, in her brother's sitting-room. She had come in by appointment from the villa, and was going with the others to look at the royal palace, which she had not yet had an opportunity to inspect. It was proposed (not by Kate), and presently arranged, that Captain Benyon should go with them ; and he accordingly walked over marble floors for half an hour, exchanging conscious commonplaces with the woman he loved. For this truth had rounded itself during those nine days of absence ; he discovered that there was nothing particularly sweet in his life when once Kate Theory had been excluded from it. He had stayed away to keep himself from falling in love with her ; but this expedient was in itself illuminating, for he perceived that, according to the vulgar adage, he was locking the stable-door after the horse had been stolen. As he paced the deck of his ship and

looked toward Posilippo his tenderness crystallised ; the thick, smoky flame of a sentiment that knew itself forbidden, and was angry at the knowledge, now danced upon the fuel of his good resolutions. The latter, it must be said, resisted, declined to be consumed. He determined that he would see Kate Theory again, for a time just sufficient to bid her good-bye and to add a little explanation. He thought of his explanation very lovingly, but it may not strike the reader as a happy inspiration. To part from her dryly, abruptly, without an allusion to what he might have said if everything had been different—that would be wisdom, of course, that would be virtue, that would be the line of a practical man, of a man who kept himself well in hand. But it would be virtue terribly unrewarded—it would be virtue too austere even for a person who flattered himself that he had taught himself stoicism. The minor luxury tempted him irresistibly, since the larger—that of happy love—was denied him ; the luxury of letting the girl know that it would not be an accident—oh, not at all—that they should never meet again. She might easily think it was, and thinking it was would doubtless do her no harm. But this wouldn't give him his pleasure—the platonic satisfaction of expressing to her at the same time his belief that they might have made each other happy and the necessity of his renunciation. That, probably, wouldn't hurt her either, for she had given him no proof whatever that she cared for him. The nearest approach to it was the way she walked beside him now, sweet and silent, without the least reference to his not having come back to the villa. The place was cool and dusky, the blinds were drawn to keep out the light and noise, and the little party wandered through the high saloons, where precious marbles and the gleam of gilding and satin made reflexions in the rich dimness. Here and

there the cicerone, in slippers, with Neapolitan familiarity, threw open a shutter to show off a picture or a tapestry. He strolled in front with Percival Theory and his wife, while this lady, drooping silently from her husband's arm as they passed, felt the stuff of the curtains and the sofas. When he caught her in these experiments the cicerone, in expressive deprecation, clasped his hands and lifted his eyebrows ; whereupon Mrs. Theory exclaimed to her husband, " Oh, bother his old king ! " It was not striking to Captain Benyon why Percival Theory had married the niece of Mr. Henry Platt. He was less interesting than his sisters—a smooth, cool, correct young man, who frequently took out a pencil and did a little arithmetic on the back of a letter. He sometimes, in spite of his correctness, chewed a toothpick, and he missed the American papers, which he used to ask for in the most unlikely places. He was a Bostonian converted to New York ; a very special type.

" Is it settled when you leave Naples ? " Benyon asked of Kate Theory.

" I think so ; on the twenty-fourth. My brother has been very kind ; he has lent us his carriage, which is a large one, so that Mildred can lie down. He and Agnes will take another ; but of course we shall travel together."

" I wish to heaven I were going with you ! " Captain Benyon said. He had given her the opportunity to respond, but she did not take it ; she merely remarked, with a vague laugh, that of course he couldn't take his ship over the Apennines. " Yes, there is always my ship," he went on. " I am afraid that in future it will carry me far away from you."

They were alone in one of the royal apartments ; their companions had passed, in advance of them, into the adjoining room. Benyon and his fellow-visitor had paused beneath one of the immense chandeliers

of glass, which in the clear, coloured gloom, through which one felt the strong outer light of Italy beating in, suspended its twinkling drops from the decorated vault. They looked round them confusedly, made shy for the moment by Benyon's having struck a note more serious than any that had hitherto sounded between them, looked at the sparse furniture, draped in white overalls, at the scagliola floor, in which the great cluster of crystal pendants seemed to shine again.

"You are master of your ship—can't you sail it as you like?" Kate Theory asked, with a smile.

"I am not master of anything. There is not a man in the world less free. I am a slave. I am a victim."

She looked at him with kind eyes; something in his voice suddenly made her put away all thought of the defensive airs that a girl, in certain situations, is expected to assume. She perceived that he wanted to make her understand something, and now her only wish was to help him to say it. "You are not happy," she murmured simply, her voice dying away in a kind of wonderment at this reality.

The gentle touch of her words—it was as if her hand had stroked his cheek—seemed to him the sweetest thing he had ever known. "No, I am not happy, because I am not free. If I were—if I were, I would give up my ship, I would give up everything, to follow you. I can't explain; that is part of the hardness of it. I only want you to know it, that if certain things were different, if everything was different, I might tell you that I believe I should have a right to speak to you. Perhaps some day it will change; but probably then it will be too late. Meanwhile, I have no right of any kind. I don't want to trouble you, and I don't ask of you—anything! It is only to have spoken just once. I don't make



## GEORGINA'S REASONS

you understand, of course. I am afraid I seem to you rather a brute, perhaps even a humbug. Don't think of it now ; don't try to understand. But some day, in the future, remember what I have said to you, and how we stood here, in this strange old place, alone ! Perhaps it will give you a little pleasure."

Kate Theory began by listening to him with visible eagerness ; but in a moment she turned away her eyes. " I am very sorry for you," she said, gravely.

" Then you do understand enough ? "

" I shall think of what you have said—in the future."

Benyon's lips formed the beginning of a word of tenderness, which he instantly suppressed ; and in a different tone, with a bitter smile and a sad shake of the head, raising his arms a moment and letting them fall, he rejoined, " It won't hurt any one, your remembering this ! "

" I don't know whom you mean." And the girl, abruptly, began to walk to the end of the room. He made no attempt to tell her whom he meant, and they proceeded together in silence till they overtook their companions.



## XII

THERE were several pictures in the neighbouring room, and Percival Theory and his wife had stopped to look at one of them, of which the cicerone announced the title and the authorship as Benyon came up. It was a modern portrait of a Bourbon princess, a woman young, fair, handsome, covered with jewels. Mrs. Percival appeared to be more struck with it than with anything the palace had yet offered to her sight, while her sister-in-law walked to the window, which the custodian had opened, to look out into the garden. Benyon noticed this ; he was conscious that he had given the girl something to reflect upon, and his ears burned a little as he stood beside Mrs. Percival and looked up, mechanically, at the royal lady. He already repented a little of what he had said ; for, after all, what was the use ? And he hoped the others wouldn't observe that he had been making love.

"Gracious, Percival ! Do you see who she looks like ? " Mrs. Theory said to her husband.

"She looks like a lady who has a big bill at Tiffany's," this gentleman answered.

"She looks like my sister-in-law ; the eyes, the mouth, the way the hair's done—the whole thing."

"Which do you mean ? You have got about a dozen."

"Why, Georgina, of course—Georgina Roy. She's awfully like."

## GEORGINA'S REASONS

"Do you call her your sister-in-law?" Percival Theory asked. "You must want very much to claim her."

"Well, she's handsome enough. You have got to invent some new name, then. Captain Benyon, what do you call your brother-in-law's second wife?" Mrs. Percival continued, turning to her neighbour, who still stood staring at the portrait. At first he had looked without seeing; then sight, and hearing as well, became quick. They were suddenly peopled with thrilling recognitions. The Bourbon princess—the eyes, the mouth, the way the hair was done, these things took on an identity, and the gaze of the painted face seemed to fasten itself to his own. But who in the world was Georgina Roy, and what was this talk about sisters-in-law? He turned to the little lady at his side a countenance unexpectedly puzzled by the problem she had lightly presented to him.

"Your brother-in-law's second wife? That's rather complicated."

"Well, of course, he needn't have married again," said Mrs. Percival, with a small sigh.

"Whom did he marry?" asked Benyon, staring. Percival Theory had turned away. "Oh, if you are going into her relationships," he murmured, and joined his sister at the brilliant window, through which, from the distance, the many-voiced uproar of Naples came in.

"He married first my sister Cora, and she died five years ago. Then he married *her*"; and Mrs. Percival nodded at the princess.

Benyon's eyes went back to the portrait; he could see what she meant—it stared out at him. "Her? Georgina?"

"Georgina Gressie! Gracious, do you know her?"

It was very distinct—that answer of Mrs. Percival's,

and the question that followed it as well. But he had the resource of the picture ; he could look at it, seem to take it very seriously, though it danced up and down before him. He felt that he was turning red, then he felt that he was turning pale. " The brazen impudence ! " That was the way he could speak to himself now of the woman he had once loved, and whom he afterwards hated, till this had died out too. Then the wonder of it was lost in the quickly growing sense that it would make a difference for him—a great difference. Exactly what, he didn't see yet ; only a difference that swelled and swelled as he thought of it, and caught up, in its expansion, the girl who stood behind him so quietly, looking into the Italian garden.

The custodian drew Mrs. Percival away to show her another princess, before Benyon answered her last inquiry. This gave him time to recover from his first impulse, which had been to answer it with a negative ; he saw in a moment that an admission of his acquaintance with Mrs. Roy (Mrs. Roy !—it was prodigious !) was necessarily helping him to learn more. Besides, it needn't be compromising. Very likely Mrs. Percival would hear one day that he had once wanted to marry her. So, when he joined his companions a minute later he remarked that he had known Miss Gressie years before, and had even admired her considerably, but had lost sight of her entirely in later days. She had been a great beauty, and it was a wonder that she had not married earlier. Five years ago, was it ? No, it was only two. He had been going to say that in so long a time it would have been singular he should not have heard of it. He had been away from New York for ages ; but one always heard of marriages and deaths. This was a proof, though two years was rather long. He led Mrs. Percival insidiously into a further room, in

## GEORGINA'S REASONS

advance of the others, to whom the cicerone returned. She was delighted to talk about her "connexions," and she supplied him with every detail. He could trust himself now; his self-possession was complete, or, so far as it was wanting, the fault was that of a sudden gaiety which he could not, on the spot, have accounted for. Of course it was not very flattering to them—Mrs. Percival's own people—that poor Cora's husband should have consoled himself; but men always did it (talk of widows!) and he had chosen a girl who was—well, very fine-looking, and the sort of successor to Cora that they needn't be ashamed of. She had been awfully admired, and no one had understood why she had waited so long to marry. She had had some affair as a girl—an engagement to an officer in the army—and the man had jilted her, or they had quarrelled, or something or other. She was almost an old maid—well, she was thirty, or very nearly—but she had done something good now. She was handsomer than ever, and tremendously striking. William Roy had one of the biggest incomes in the city, and he was quite affectionate. He had been intensely fond of Cora—he often spoke of her still, at least to her own relations; and her portrait, the last time Mrs. Percival was in his house (it was at a party, after his marriage to Miss Gressie) was still in the front parlour. Perhaps by this time he had had it moved to the back; but she was sure he would keep it somewhere, anyway. Poor Cora had had no children; but Georgina was making that all right; she had a beautiful boy. Mrs. Percival had what she would have called quite a pleasant chat with Captain Benyon about Mrs. Roy. Perhaps *he* was the officer—she never thought of that! He was sure he had never jilted her? And he had never quarrelled with a lady? Well, he must be different from most men.

## GEORGINA'S REASONS

He certainly had the air of being so before he parted that afternoon with Kate Theory. This young lady, at least, was free to think him wanting in that consistency which is supposed to be a distinctively masculine virtue. An hour before he had taken an eternal farewell of her ; and now he was alluding to future meetings, to future visits, proposing that, with her sister-in-law, she should appoint an early day for coming to see the *Louisiana*. She had supposed she understood him, but it would appear now that she had not understood him at all. His manner had changed too. More and more off his guard, Raymond Benyon was not aware how much more hopeful an expression it gave him, his irresistible sense that somehow or other this extraordinary proceeding of his wife's would set him free. Kate Theory felt rather weary and mystified, all the more for knowing that henceforth Captain Benyon's variations would be the most important thing in life for her.

### XIII

THAT officer, on his ship in the bay, lingered very late on the deck that night—lingered there, indeed, under the warm southern sky, in which the stars glittered with a hot, red light, until the early dawn began to show. He smoked cigar after cigar; he walked up and down by the hour; he was agitated by a thousand reflexions; he repeated to himself that it made a difference—an immense difference; but the pink light had deepened in the east before he had discovered in what the change consisted. By that time he saw it clearly—it consisted in Georgina's being in his power now, in place of his being in hers. He laughed as he sat alone in the darkness at the thought of what she had done. It had occurred to him more than once that she would do it; he believed her capable of anything; but the accomplished fact had a freshness of comicality. He thought of William Roy, of his big income, of his being "quite affectionate," of his blooming son and heir, of his having found such a worthy successor to poor Mrs. Cora. He wondered whether Georgina had mentioned to him that she had a husband living, but was strongly of the belief that she had not. Why should she, after all? She had neglected to mention it to so many others. He had thought he knew her, in so many years, that he had nothing more to learn about her, but this ripe stroke revived his sense of her audacity. Of course

it was what she had been waiting for, and if she had not done it sooner it was because she had hoped he would be lost at sea in one of his long cruises and relieve her of the necessity of a crime. How she must hate him to-day for not having been lost, for being alive, for continuing to put her in the wrong ! Much as she hated him, however, his own loathing was at least a match for hers. She had done him the foulest of wrongs—she had ravaged his life. That he should ever detest in this degree a woman whom he had once loved as he loved her he would not have thought possible in his innocent younger years. But neither would he have thought it possible then that a woman should be such a cold-blooded devil as she had been. His love had perished in his rage, his blinding, impotent rage, at finding that he had been duped and measuring his impotence. When he learned, years before, from Mrs. Portico, what she had done with her baby, of whose entrance into life she herself had given him no intimation, he felt that he was face to face with a full revelation of her nature. Before that it had puzzled him, it had mocked him ; his relations with her were bewildering, stupefying. But when, after obtaining, with difficulty and delay, a leave of absence from Government, and betaking himself to Italy to look for the child and assume possession of it, he had encountered absolute failure and defeat, then the case presented itself to him more simply. He perceived that he had mated himself with a creature who just happened to be a monster, a human exception altogether. That was what he couldn't pardon—her conduct about the child ; never, never, never ! To him she might have done what she chose—dropped him, pushed him out into eternal cold, with his hands fast tied—and he would have accepted it, excused her almost, admitted that it had been his business to mind better what he was about.



But she had tortured him through the poor little irrecoverable son whom he had never seen, through the heart and the human vitals that she had not herself, and that he had to have, poor wretch, for both of them.

All his effort, for years, had been to forget those horrible months, and he had cut himself off from them so that they seemed at times to belong to the life of another person. But to-night he lived them over again; he retraced the different gradations of darkness through which he had passed, from the moment, so soon after his extraordinary marriage, when it came over him that she already repented and meant, if possible, to elude all her obligations. This was the moment when he saw why she had reserved herself—in the strange vow she extracted from him—an open door for retreat; the moment, too, when her having had such an inspiration (in the midst of her momentary good faith, if good faith it had ever been) struck him as a proof of her essential depravity. What he had tried to forget came back to him: the child that was not his child produced for him when he fell upon that squalid nest of peasants in the Genoese country, and then the confessions, retractations, contradictions, lies, terrors, threats, and general bottomless, baffling mendacity and idiocy of every one in the place. The child was gone; that had been the only definite thing. The woman who had taken it to nurse had a dozen different stories, her husband had as many, and every one in the village had a hundred more. Georgina had been sending money—she had managed, apparently, to send a good deal—and the whole country seemed to have been living on it and making merry. At one moment, the baby had died and received a most expensive burial; at another, he had been entrusted (for more healthy air, Santissima Madonna!) to the woman's

cousin, in another village. According to a version which for a day or two Benyon had inclined to think the least false, he had been taken by the cousin (for his beauty's sake) to Genoa, when she went for the first time in her life to the town to see her daughter in service there, and had been confided for a few hours to a third woman, who was to keep him while the cousin walked about the streets, but who, having no child of her own, took such a fancy to him that she refused to give him up, and a few days later left the place (she was a Pisana) never to be heard of more. The cousin had forgotten her name—it had happened six months before. Benyon spent a year looking up and down Italy for his child, and inspecting hundreds of swaddled infants, inscrutable candidates for recognition. Of course he could only get further and further from real knowledge, and his search was arrested by the conviction that it was making him mad. He set his teeth and made up his mind, or tried to, that the baby had died in the hands of its nurse. This was, after all, much the likeliest supposition, and the woman had maintained it, in the hope of being rewarded for her candour, quite as often as she had asseverated that it was still somewhere, alive, in the hope of being remunerated for her good news. It may be imagined with what sentiments toward his wife Benyon had emerged from this episode. To-night his memory went further back—back to the beginning and to the days when he had had to ask himself, with all the crudity of his first surprise, what in the name of perversity she had wished to do with him. The answer to this speculation was so old, it had dropped so out of the line of recurrence, that it was now almost new again. Moreover, it was only approximate, for, as I have already said, he could comprehend such baseness as little at the end as at the beginning. She had found

## GEORGINA'S REASONS

herself on a slope which her nature forced her to descend to the bottom. She did him the honour of wishing to enjoy his society, and she did herself the honour of thinking that their intimacy, however brief, must have a certain consecration. She felt that with him, after his promise (he would have made any promise to lead her on), she was secure, secure as she had proved to be, secure as she must think herself. That security had helped her to ask herself, after the first flush of passion was over, and her native, her twice-inherited worldliness had had time to open its eyes again, why she should keep faith with a man whose deficiencies (as a husband before the world—another affair) had been so scientifically exposed to her by her parents. So she had simply determined *not* to keep faith ; and her determination, at least, she did keep.

By the time Benyon turned in he had satisfied himself, as I say, that Georgina was now in his power ; and this seemed to him such an improvement in his situation that he allowed himself, for the next ten days, a license which made Kate Theory almost as happy as it made her sister, though she pretended to understand it far less. Mildred sank to her rest, or rose to fuller comprehensions, within the year, in the Isle of Wight ; and Captain Benyon, who had never written so many letters as since they left Naples, sailed westward about the same time as the sweet survivor. For the *Louisiana* at last was ordered home.

## XIV

CERTAINLY, I will see you if you come, and you may appoint any day or hour you like. I should have seen you with pleasure any time these last years. Why should we not be friends, as we used to be? Perhaps we shall be yet. I say "perhaps" only, on purpose, because your note is rather vague about your state of mind. Don't come with any idea about making me nervous or uncomfortable. I am not nervous by nature, thank heaven, and I won't, I positively won't (do you hear, dear Captain Benyon?) be uncomfortable. I have been so (it served me right) for years and years; but I am very happy now. To remain so is the very definite intention of yours ever

GEORGINA ROY.

This was the answer Benyon received to a short letter that he despatched to Mrs. Roy after his return to America. It was not till he had been there some weeks that he wrote to her. He had been occupied in various ways: he had had to look after his ship; he had had to report at Washington; he had spent a fortnight with his mother at Portsmouth, N.H.; and he had paid a visit to Kate Theory in Boston. She herself was paying visits; she was staying with various relatives and friends. She had more colour—it was very delicately rosy—than she had had of old, in spite of her black dress; and the effect of her looking at him seemed to him to make her eyes grow prettier still. Though sisterless now, she was not without duties, and Benyon could easily see that

## GEORGINA'S REASONS

life would press hard on her unless some one should interfere. Every one regarded her as just the person to do certain things. Every one thought she could do everything, because she had nothing else to do. She used to read to the blind, and, more onerously, to the deaf. She looked after other people's children while the parents attended anti-slavery conventions.

She was coming to New York, later, to spend a week at her brother's, but beyond this she had no idea what she should do. Benyon felt it to be awkward that he should not be able just now to tell her; and this had much to do with his coming to the point, for he accused himself of having rather hung fire. Coming to the point, for Benyon, meant writing a note to Mrs. Roy (as he must call her), in which he asked whether she would see him if he should present himself. The missive was short; it contained, in addition to what I have hinted, little more than the remark that he had something of importance to say to her. Her reply, which we have just read, was prompt. Benyon designated an hour, and rang the door-bell of her big modern house, whose polished windows seemed to shine defiance at him.

As he stood on the steps, looking up and down the straight vista of the Fifth Avenue, he perceived that he was trembling a little, that he was nervous, if she were not. He was ashamed of his agitation, and he pulled himself vigorously together. Afterwards he saw that what had made him nervous was not any doubt of the goodness of his cause, but his revived sense (as he drew near her) of his wife's hardness, her capacity for insolence. He might only break himself against that, and the prospect made him feel helpless. She kept him waiting for a long time after he had been introduced; and as he walked up and down her drawing-room, an immense, florid, expensive apartment, covered with blue satin, gilding,

mirrors and bad frescoes, it came over him as a certainty that her delay was calculated. She wished to annoy him, to weary him ; she was as ungenerous as she was unscrupulous. It never occurred to him that, in spite of the bold words of her note, she, too, might be in a tremor, and if any one in their secret had suggested that she was afraid to meet him, he would have laughed at this idea. This was of bad omen for the success of his errand ; for it showed that he recognised the ground of her presumption—his having the superstition of old promises. By the time she appeared he was flushed, very angry. She closed the door behind her, and stood there looking at him, with the width of the room between them.

The first emotion her presence excited was a quick sense of the strange fact that, after all these years of loneliness, such a magnificent person should be his wife. For she was magnificent, in the maturity of her beauty, her head erect, her complexion splendid, her auburn tresses undimmed, a certain plenitude in her very glance. He saw in a moment that she wished to see him beautiful, she had endeavoured to dress herself to the best effect. Perhaps, after all, it was only for this she had delayed ; she wished to give herself every possible touch. For some moments they said nothing ; they had not stood face to face for nearly ten years, and they met now as adversaries. No two persons could possibly be more interested in taking each other's measure. It scarcely belonged to Georgina, however, to have too much the air of timidity, and after a moment, satisfied, apparently, that she was not to receive a broadside, she advanced, slowly, rubbing her jewelled hands and smiling. He wondered why she should smile, what thought was in her mind. His impressions followed each other with extraordinary quickness of pulse, and now he saw, in addition to what he had already perceived,



## GEORGINA'S REASONS

that she was waiting to take her cue: she had determined on no definite line. There was nothing definite about her but her courage; the rest would depend upon him. As for her courage, it seemed to glow in the beauty which grew greater as she came nearer, with her eyes on his and her fixed smile; to be expressed in the very perfume that accompanied her steps. By this time he had got a still further impression, and it was the strangest of all. She was ready for anything, she was capable of anything, she wished to surprise him with her beauty, to remind him that it belonged, after all, at the bottom of everything, to him. She was ready to bribe him, if bribing should be necessary. She had carried on an intrigue before she was twenty; it would be more, rather than less, easy for her now that she was thirty. All this and more was in her cold, living eyes, as, in the prolonged silence, they engaged themselves with his; but I must not dwell upon it, for reasons extraneous to the remarkable fact. She was a truly amazing creature.

"Raymond!" she said, in a low voice—a voice which might represent either a vague greeting or an appeal.

He took no heed of the exclamation, but asked her why she had deliberately kept him waiting, as if she had not made a fool enough of him already. She couldn't suppose it was for his pleasure he had come into the house.

She hesitated a moment, still with her smile. "I must tell you I have a son, the dearest little boy. His nurse happened to be engaged for the moment, and I had to watch him. I am more devoted to him than you might suppose."

He fell back from her a few steps. "I wonder if you are insane," he murmured.

"To allude to my child? Why do you ask me



such questions then? I tell you the simple truth. I take every care of this one. I am older and wiser. The other one was a complete mistake; he had no right to exist."

"Why didn't you kill him then with your own hands, instead of that torture?"

"Why didn't I kill myself? That question would be more to the point. You are looking wonderfully well," she broke off, in another tone; "hadn't we better sit down?"

"I didn't come here for the advantage of conversation," Benyon answered. And he was going on, but she interrupted him.

"You came to say something dreadful, very likely; though I hoped you would see it was better not. But just tell me this, before you begin. Are you successful, are you happy? It has been so provoking, not knowing more about you."

There was something in the manner in which this was said that caused him to break into a loud laugh; whereupon she added—

"Your laugh is just what it used to be. How it comes back to me! You *have* improved in appearance," she continued.

She had seated herself, though he remained standing; and she leaned back in a low, deep chair, looking up at him, with her arms folded. He stood near her and over her, as it were, dropping his baffled eyes on her, with his hand resting on the corner of the chimney-piece. "Has it never occurred to you that I may deem myself absolved from the promise I made you before I married you?"

"Very often, of course. But I have instantly dismissed the idea. How can you be 'absolved'? One promises, or one doesn't. I attach no meaning to that, and neither do you." And she glanced down at the front of her dress.

## GEORGINA'S REASONS

Benyon listened, but he went on as if he had not heard her. "What I came to say to you is this: that I should like your consent to my bringing a suit for divorce against you."

"A suit for divorce? I never thought of that."

"So that I may marry another woman. I can easily obtain a divorce on the ground of your desertion. It will simplify our situation."

She stared a moment, then her smile solidified, as it were, and she looked grave; but he could see that her gravity, with her lifted eyebrows, was partly assumed. "Ah, you want to marry another woman!" she exclaimed, slowly, thoughtfully. He said nothing, and she went on, "Why don't you do as I have done?"

"Because I don't want my children to be——"

Before he could say the words she sprang up, checking him with a cry. "Don't say it; it isn't necessary! Of course I know what you mean; but they won't be if no one knows it."

"I should object to knowing it myself; it's enough for me to know it of yours."

"Of course I have been prepared for your saying that."

"I should hope so!" Benyon exclaimed. "You may be a bigamist, if it suits you, but to me the idea is not attractive. I wish to marry ——" and, hesitating a moment, with his slight stammer, he repeated, "I wish to marry——"

"Marry, then, and have done with it!" cried Mrs. Roy.

He could already see that he should be able to extract no consent from her; he felt rather sick. "It's extraordinary to me that you shouldn't be more afraid of being found out," he said, after a moment's reflexion. "There are two or three possible accidents."

## GEORGINA'S REASONS

"How do you know how much afraid I am? I have thought of every accident, in dreadful nights. How do you know what my life is, or what it has been all these horrid years? But every one is dead."

"You look wasted and worn, certainly."

"Ah, don't compliment me!" Georgina exclaimed. "If I had never known you—if I had not been through all this—I believe I should have been handsome. When did you hear of my marriage? Where were you at the time?"

"At Naples, more than six months ago, by a mere chance."

"How strange that it should have taken you so long! Is the lady a Neapolitan? They don't mind what they do over there."

"I have no information to give you beyond what I have just said," Benyon rejoined. "My life doesn't in the least regard you."

"Ah, but it does from the moment I refuse to let you divorce me."

"You refuse?" Benyon said, softly.

"Don't look at me that way! You haven't advanced so rapidly as I used to think you would; you haven't distinguished yourself so much," she went on, irrelevantly.

"I shall be promoted commodore one of these days," Benyon answered. "You don't know much about it, for my advancement has already been extraordinarily rapid." He blushed as soon as the words were out of his mouth. She gave a light laugh on seeing it; but he took up his hat and added, "Think over a day or two what I have proposed to you. It's a perfectly possible proceeding. Think of the temper in which I ask it."

"The temper?" she stared. "Pray, what have you to do with temper?" And as he made no

## GEORGINA'S REASONS

reply, smoothing his hat with his glove, she went on, " Years ago, as much as you please ! you had a good right, I don't deny, and you raved, in your letters, to your heart's content. That's why I wouldn't see you ; I didn't wish to take it full in the face. But that's all over now ; time is a healer ; you have cooled off, and by your own admission you have consoled yourself. Why do you talk to me about temper ? What in the world have I done to you but let you alone ? "

" What do you call this business ? " Benyon asked, with his eye flashing all over the room.

" Ah, excuse me, that doesn't touch you ; it's my affair. I leave you your liberty, and I can live as I like. If I choose to live in this way, it may be queer (I admit it is, tremendously), but you have nothing to say to it. If I am willing to take the risk, you may be. If I am willing to play such an infernal trick upon a confiding gentleman (I will put it as strongly as you possibly could), I don't see what you have to say to it except that you are exceedingly glad such a woman as that isn't known to be your wife ! " She had been cool and deliberate up to this time, but with these words her latent agitation broke out. " Do you think I have been happy ? Do you think I have enjoyed existence ? Do you see me freezing up into a stark old maid ? "

" I wonder you stood out so long," said Benyon.

" I wonder I did ! They were bad years."

" I have no doubt they were ! "

" You could do as you pleased," Georgina went on. " You roamed about the world, you formed charming relations. I am delighted to hear it from your own lips. Think of my going back to my father's house—that family vault—and living there, year after year, as Miss Gressie ! If you remember my father and mother—they are round in Twelfth Street, just

the same—you must admit that I paid for my folly ! ”

“ I have never understood you ; I don't understand you now,” said Benyon.

She looked at him a moment. “ I adored you.”

“ I could damn you with a word ! ” he exclaimed.

## XV

THE moment he had spoken she grasped his arm and held up her other hand, as if she were listening to a sound outside the room. She had evidently had an inspiration, and she carried it into instant effect. She swept away to the door, flung it open, and passed into the hall, whence her voice came back to Benyon as she addressed a person who apparently was her husband. She had heard him enter the house, at his habitual hour, after his long morning at business ; the closing of the door of the vestibule had struck her ear. The parlour was on a level with the hall, and she greeted him without impediment. She asked him to come in and he introduced to Captain Benyon, and he responded with due solemnity. She returned in advance of him, her eyes fixed upon Benyon and lighted with defiance, her whole face saying to him vividly, " Here is your opportunity ; I give it to you with my own hands. Break your promise and betray me if you dare ! You say you can damn me with a word ; speak the word and let us see ! "

Benyon's heart beat faster, as he felt that it was indeed a chance ; but half his emotion came from the spectacle, magnificent in its way, of her unparalleled impudence. A sense of all that he had escaped in not having had to live with her rolled over him like a wave, while he looked strangely at Mr. Roy, to

whom this privilege had been vouchsafed. He saw in a moment his successor had a constitution that would carry it. Mr. Roy suggested squareness and solidity ; he was a broad-based, comfortable, polished man, with a surface in which the rank tendrils of irritation would not easily obtain a foothold. He had a broad, blank face, a capacious mouth, and a small, light eye, to which, as he entered, he was engaged in adjusting a double gold-rimmed glass. He approached Benyon with a prudent, civil, punctual air, as if he habitually met a good many gentlemen in the course of business, and though, naturally, this was not that sort of occasion, he was not a man to waste time in preliminaries. Benyon had immediately the impression of having seen him, or his equivalent, a thousand times before. He was middle-aged, fresh-coloured, whiskered, prosperous, indefinite. Georgina introduced them to each other—she spoke of Benyon as an old friend, whom she had known long before she had known Mr. Roy, who had been very kind to her years ago, when she was a girl.

“He is in the navy. He has just come back from a long cruise.”

Mr. Roy shook hands—Benyon gave him his before he knew it—said he was very happy, smiled, looked at Benyon from head to foot, then at Georgina, then round the room, then back at Benyon again—at Benyon, who stood there, without sound or movement, with a dilated eye and a pulse quickened to a degree of which Mr. Roy could have little idea. Georgina made some remark about their sitting down, but William Roy replied that he hadn't time for that, if Captain Benyon would excuse him. He should have to go straight into the library and write a note to send back to his office, where, as he just remembered, he had neglected to give, in leaving the place, an important direction.



## GEORGINA'S REASONS

"You can wait a moment, surely," Georgina said.  
"Captain Benyon wants so much to see you."

"Oh yes, my dear; I can wait a minute, and I can come back."

Benyon saw, accordingly, that he was waiting, and that Georgina was waiting too. Each was waiting for him to say something, though they were waiting for different things. Mr. Roy put his hands behind him, balanced himself on his toes, hoped that Captain Benyon had enjoyed his cruise—though he shouldn't care much for the navy himself—and evidently wondered at the vacuity of his wife's visitor. Benyon knew he was speaking, for he indulged in two or three more observations, after which he stopped. But his meaning was not present to our hero. This personage was conscious of only one thing, of his own momentary power, of everything that hung on his lips; all the rest swam before him; there was vagueness in his ears and eyes. Mr. Roy stopped, as I say, and there was a pause, which seemed to Benyon of tremendous length. He knew, while it lasted, that Georgina was as conscious as himself that he felt his opportunity, that he held it there in his hand, weighing it noiselessly in the palm, and that she braved and scorned, or rather that she enjoyed, the danger. He asked himself whether he should be able to speak if he were to try, and then he knew that he should not, that the words would stick in his throat, that he should make sounds which would dishonour his cause. There was no real choice nor decision, then, on Benyon's part; his silence was after all the same old silence, the fruit of other hours and places, the stillness to which Georgina listened while he felt her eager eyes fairly eat into his face, so that his cheeks burned with the touch of them. The moments stood before him in their turn; each one was distinct. "Ah, well," said Mr. Roy, "perhaps

I interrupt ; I will just dash off my note." Benyon knew that he was rather bewildered, that he was making a protest, that he was leaving the room ; knew presently that Georgina again stood before him alone.

" You are exactly the man I thought you ! " she announced, as joyously as if she had won a bet.

" You are the most horrible woman I can imagine. Good God, if I had to live with you ! " That is what he said to her in answer.

Even at this she never flinched ; she continued to smile in triumph. " He adores me—but what's that to you ? Of course you have all the future," she went on ; " but I know you as if I had made you ! "

Benyon considered a moment. " If he adores you, you are all right. If our divorce is pronounced you will be free, and then he can marry you properly, which he would like ever so much better."

" It's too touching to hear you reason about it. Fancy me telling such a hideous story—about myself—me—me ! " And she touched her breasts with her white fingers.

Benyon gave her a look that was charged with all the sickness of his helpless rage. " You—you ! " he repeated, as he turned away from her and passed through the door which Mr. Roy had left open.

She followed him into the hall, she was close behind him ; he moved before her as she pressed. " There was one more reason," she said. " I wouldn't be forbidden. It was my hideous pride. That's what prevents me now."

" I don't care what it is," Benyon answered, wearily, with his hand on the knob of the door.

She laid hers on his shoulder ; he stood there an instant, feeling it, wishing that her loathsome touch gave him the right to strike her to the earth, to strike her so that she should never rise again.

## GEORGINA'S REASONS

"How clever you are, and intelligent always, as you used to be; to feel so perfectly and know so well—without more scenes—that it's hopeless—my ever consenting! If I have, with you, the shame of having made you promise, let me at least have the profit!"

His back had been turned to her, but at this he glanced round. "To hear you talk of shame——!"

"You don't know what I have gone through; but, of course, I don't ask any pity from you. Only I should like to say something kind to you before we part. I admire you so much. Who will ever tell her, if you don't? How will she ever know, then? She will be as safe as I am. You know what that is," said Georgina, smiling.

He had opened the door wide while she spoke, apparently not heeding her, thinking only of getting away from her for ever. In reality he heard every word she said, and felt to his marrow the lowered, suggested tone in which she made him that last recommendation. Outside, on the steps—she stood there in the doorway—he gave her his last look. "I only hope you will die. I shall pray for that!" And he descended into the street and took his way.

It was after this that his real temptation came. Not the temptation to return betrayal for betrayal; that passed away even in a few days, for he simply knew that he couldn't break his promise, that it imposed itself on him as stubbornly as the colour of his eyes or the stammer of his lips; it had gone forth into the world to live for itself, and was far beyond his reach or his authority. But the temptation to go through the form of a marriage with Kate Theory, to let her suppose that he was as free as herself and that their children, if they should have any, would, before the law, have a right to exist—this attractive idea held him fast for many weeks,

and caused him to pass some haggard nights and days. It was perfectly possible she might never learn his secret, and that, as no one could either suspect it or have an interest in bringing it to light, they both might live and die in security and honour. This vision fascinated him; it was, I say, a real temptation. He thought of other solutions — of telling her that he was married (without telling her to whom), and inducing her to overlook such an accident and content herself with a ceremony in which the world would see no flaw. But after all the contortions of his spirit it remained as clear to him as before that dishonour was in everything but renunciation. So, at last, he renounced. He took two steps which attested this act to himself. He addressed an urgent request to the Secretary of the Navy that he might, with as little delay as possible, be despatched on another long voyage; and he returned to Boston to tell Kate Theory that they must wait. He could explain so little that, say what he would, he was aware that he could not make his conduct seem natural, and he saw that the girl only trusted him, that she never understood. She trusted without understanding, and she agreed to wait. When the writer of these pages last heard of the pair they were waiting still.



A LANDSCAPE-PAINTER





Do you remember how, a dozen years ago, a number of our friends were startled by the report of the rupture of young Locksley's engagement with Miss Leary? This event made some noise in its day. Both parties possessed certain claims to distinction: Locksley in his wealth, which was believed to be enormous, and the young lady in her beauty, which was in truth very great. I used to hear that her lover was fond of comparing her to the Venus of Milo; and, indeed, if you can imagine the mutilated goddess with her full complement of limbs, dressed out by Madame de Crinoline, and engaged in small-talk beneath the drawing-room chandelier, you may obtain a vague notion of Miss Josephine Leary. Locksley, you remember, was rather a short man, dark, and not particularly good-looking; and when he walked about with his betrothed it was half a matter of surprise that he should have ventured to propose to a young lady of such heroic proportions. Miss Leary had the grey eyes and auburn hair which I have always attributed to the famous statue. The one defect in her face, in spite of an expression of great candour and sweetness, was a certain lack of animation. What it was besides her beauty that attracted Locksley I never discovered; perhaps, since his attachment was so short-lived, it was her beauty alone. I say that his attachment was of brief duration, because the break was understood to have come from him. Both he and Miss Leary very wisely held

their tongues on the matter ; but among their friends and enemies it of course received a hundred explanations. That most popular with Locksley's well-wishers was, that he had backed out (these events are discussed, you know, in fashionable circles very much as an expected prize-fight which has miscarried is canvassed in reunions of another kind) only on flagrant evidence of the lady's—what, faithlessness ?—on overwhelming proof of the most *mercenary* spirit on the part of Miss Leary. You see, our friend was held capable of doing battle for an "idea." It must be owned that this was a novel charge ; but, for myself, having long known Mrs. Leary, the mother, who was a widow with four daughters, to be an inveterate old screw, it was not impossible for me to believe that her first-born had also shown the cloven foot. I suppose that the young lady's family had, on their own side, a very plausible version of their disappointment. It was, however, soon made up to them by Josephine's marriage with a gentleman of expectations very nearly as brilliant as those of her old suitor. And what was *his* compensation ? That is precisely my story.

Locksley disappeared, as you will remember, from public view. The events above alluded to happened in March. On calling at his lodgings in April I was told he had gone to the country. But towards the last of May I met him. He told me that he was on the look-out for a quiet, unfrequented place at the seaside, where he might rusticate and sketch. He was looking very poorly. I suggested Newport, and I remember he hardly had the energy to smile at the simple joke. We parted without my having been able to satisfy him, and for a very long time I quite lost sight of him. He died seven years ago, at the age of thirty-five. For five years, accordingly, he managed to shield his life from the eyes of men.

Through circumstances which I need not go into, a good many of his personal belongings have become mine. You will remember that he was a man of what are called cultivated tastes; that is, he was fond of reading, wrote a little, and painted a good deal. He wrote some rather amateurish verse, but he produced a number of remarkable paintings. He left a mass of papers, on many subjects, few of which are calculated to be generally interesting. A few of them, however, I highly prize—that portion which constitutes his private diary. It extends from his twenty-fifth to his thirtieth year, at which period it breaks off suddenly. If you will come to my house I will show you such of his pictures and sketches as I possess, and, I trust, convert you to my opinion that he had in him the stuff of a charming artist. Meanwhile I will place before you the last hundred pages of his diary, as an answer to your inquiry regarding the ultimate view taken by the great Nemesis of his treatment of Miss Leary—his scorn of the magnificent Venus Victrix. The recent passing away of the one person who had a voice paramount to mine in the disposal of Locksley's effects enables me to act without reserve.

*Chowderville, June 9th.*—I have been sitting some minutes, pen in hand, wondering whether on this new earth, beneath this new sky, I had better resume this occasional history of nothing at all. I think I will at all events make the experiment. If we fail, as Lady Macbeth remarks, we fail. I find my entries have been longest when I have had least to say. I doubt not, therefore, that, once I have had a sufficient dose of dulness, I shall sit scribbling from morning till night. If nothing happens—— But my prophetic soul tells me that something *will* happen. I am determined that something shall—if it be nothing else than that I paint a picture.

When I came up to bed half an hour ago I was deadlly sleepy. Now, after looking out of the window a little, my brain is immensely refreshed, and I feel as if I could write till morning. But, unfortunately, I have nothing to write about. And then, if I expect to rise early, I must turn in betimes. The whole village is asleep, godless metropolitan that I am! The lamps on the square, outside, flicker in the wind; there is nothing abroad but the blue darkness and the smell of the rising tide. I have spent the whole day on my legs, trudging from one side of the peninsula to the other. What a trump is old Mrs. Monkhouse, to have thought of this place! I must write her a letter of passionate thanks. Never before have I seen such a pretty little coast—never before have I been so taken with wave and rock and cloud. I am filled with ecstasy at the life, light, and transparency of the air. I am enamoured of all the moods and tenses of the ocean; and as yet, I suppose, I have not seen half of them. I came in to supper hungry, weary, footsore, sunburnt, dirty—happier, in short, than I have been for a twelvemonth. And now, if you please, for the prodigies of the brush!

*June 11th.*—Another day afoot, and also afloat. I resolved this morning to leave this abominable little tavern; I can't stand my feather-bed another night. I determined to find some other prospect than the town-pump and the "drug store." I questioned my host, after breakfast, as to the possibility of getting lodgings in any of the outlying farms and cottages. But my host either did not or would not know anything about the matter. So I resolved to wander forth and seek my fortune—to roam inquisitive through the neighbourhood, and appeal to the indigenous sentiment of hospitality. But never have I seen a folk so devoid of this amiable quality. By dinner time I had given up in despair. After dinner

I strolled down to the harbour, which is close at hand. The brightness and breeziness of the water tempted me to hire a boat and resume my explorations. I procured an old tub, with a short stump of a mast, which, being planted quite in the centre, gave the craft much the appearance of an inverted mushroom. I made for what I took to be, and what is, an island, lying long and low, some four or five miles over against the town. I sailed for half an hour directly before the wind, and at last found myself aground on the shelving beach of a quiet little cove. Such a dear little cove—so bright, so still, so warm, so remote from Chowderville, which lay in the distance, white and semicircular! I leaped ashore, and dropped my anchor. Before me rose a steep cliff, crowned with an old ruined fort or tower. I made my way up, and round to the landward entrance. The fort is a hollow old shell; looking upwards, from the beach, you see the harmless blue sky through the gaping loopholes. Its interior is choked with rocks and brambles and masses of fallen masonry. I scrambled up to the parapet, and obtained a noble sea-view. Beyond the broad bay I saw the miniature town and country mapped out before me; and on the other hand, I saw the infinite Atlantic—over which, by the by, all the pretty things are brought from Paris. I spent the whole afternoon in wandering hither and thither on the hills that encircle the little cove in which I had landed, heedless of the minutes and the miles, watching the sailing clouds and the flitting, gleaming sails, listening to the musical attrition of the tidal pebbles, passing the time anyhow. The only particular sensation I remember was that of being ten years old again, together with a general impression of Saturday afternoon, of the liberty to go in wading or even swimming, and of the prospect of limping home in the dusk with a wondrous story

of having almost caught a turtle. When I returned I found—but I know very well what I found, and I need hardly repeat it here for my mortification. Heaven knows I never was a practical character. What thought I about the tide? There lay the old tub, high and dry, with the rusty anchor protruding from the flat green stones and the shallow puddles left by the receding wave. Moving the boat an inch, much more a dozen yards, was quite beyond my strength. I slowly reascended the cliff, to see if from its summit any help was discernible. None was within sight, and I was about to go down again, in profound dejection, when I saw a trim little sail-boat shoot out from behind a neighbouring bluff, and advance along the shore. I quickened pace. On reaching the beach I found the new-comer standing out about a hundred yards. The man at the helm appeared to regard me with some interest. With a mute prayer that his disposition might not be hostile—he didn't look like a wild islander—I invited him by voice and gesture to make for a little point of rocks a short distance above us, where I proceeded to join him. I told him my story, and he readily took me aboard. He was a civil old gentleman, of the seafaring sort, who appeared to be cruising about in the evening-breeze for his pleasure. On landing I visited the proprietor of my old tub, related my misadventure, and offered to pay damages if the boat shall turn out in the morning to have sustained any. Meanwhile, I suppose, it is held secure against the next tidal revolution, however violent.

But for my old gentleman. I have decidedly picked up an acquaintance, if not made a friend. I gave him a very good cigar, and before we reached home we had become thoroughly intimate. In exchange for my cigar he gave me his name; and there was that in his tone which seemed to imply that I



had by no means the worst of the exchange. His name is Richard Quarterman, "though most people," he added, "call me Cap'n, for respect." He then proceeded to inquire my own titles and pretensions. I told him no lies, but I told him only half the truth; and if he chooses to indulge mentally in any romantic understatements, why, he is welcome, and bless his simple heart! The fact is, I have simply broken with the past. I have decided, coolly and calmly, as I believe, that it is necessary to my success, or, at any rate, to my happiness, to abjure for a while my conventional self, and to assume a simple, natural character. How can a man be simple and natural who is known to have a large income? That is the supreme curse. It's bad enough to have it; to be known to have it, to be known only because you have it, is most damnable. I suppose I am too proud to be successfully rich. Let me see how poverty will serve my turn. I have taken a fresh start—I have determined to stand upon my merits. If they fail me I shall fall back upon my dollars, but with God's help I will test them, and see what kind of stuff I am made of. To be young, strong and poor—such, in this blessed nineteenth century, is the great basis of solid success. I have resolved to take at least one brief draught from the founts of inspiration of my time. I replied to Captain Quarterman with such reservations as a brief survey of these principles dictated. What a luxury to pass in a poor man's mind for his brother! I begin to respect myself. Thus much the Captain knows: that I am an educated man, with a taste for painting; that I have come hither for the purpose of studying and sketching coast-scenery; toning myself up with the sea air. I have reason to believe, moreover, that he suspects me of limited means and of being of a very frugal mind. Amen! *Vogue la galère!* But the point of my story



is in his very hospitable offer of lodgings—I had been telling him of my want of success in the morning in the pursuit of the same. He is a queer mixture of the gentleman of the old school and the hot-headed merchant-captain.

“Young man,” said he, after taking several meditative puffs of his cigar, “I don’t see the point of your living in a tavern when there are folks about you with more house-room than they know what to do with. A tavern is only half a house, just as one of these new-fashioned screw-propellers is only half a ship. Suppose you walk round and take a look at my place. I own quite a respectable tenement over yonder to the left of the town. Do you see that old wharf with the tumble-down warehouses, and the long row of elms behind it? I live right in the midst of the elms. We have the sweetest little garden in the world, stretching down to the water’s edge. It’s all as quiet as anything can be, short of a churchyard. The back windows, you know, overlook the harbour; and you can see twenty miles up the bay, and fifty miles out to sea. You can paint to yourself there the livelong day, with no more fear of intrusion than if you were out yonder at the light-ship. There’s no one but myself and my daughter, who’s a perfect lady, sir. She teaches music in a young ladies’ school. You see, money’s an object, as they say. We have never taken boarders yet, because none ever came in our track; but I guess we can learn the ways. I suppose you’ve boarded before; you can put us up to a thing or two.”

There was something so kindly and honest in the old man’s weather-beaten face, something so friendly in his address, that I forthwith struck a bargain with him, subject to his daughter’s approval. I am to have her answer to-morrow. This same daughter strikes me as rather a dark spot in the picture.

Teacher in a young ladies' school—probably the establishment of which Mrs. Monkhouse spoke to me. I suppose she's over thirty. I think I know the species.

*June 12th, A.M.*—I have really nothing to do but to scribble. "Barkis is willing." Captain Quarterman brought me word this morning that his daughter makes no objection. I am to report this evening ; but I shall send my slender baggage in an hour or two.

*P.M.*—Here I am, domiciled, almost domesticated. The house is less than a mile from the inn, and reached by a very pleasant road, which skirts the harbour. At about six o'clock I presented myself ; Captain Quarterman had described the place. A very civil old negress admitted me, and ushered me into the garden, where I found my friends watering their flowers. The old man was in his house-coat and slippers—he gave me a cordial welcome. There is something delightfully easy in his manners—and in Miss Quarterman's, too, for that matter. She received me very nicely. The late Mrs. Quarterman was probably a superior being. As for the young lady's being thirty, she is about twenty-four. She wore a fresh white dress, with a blue ribbon on her neck, and a rosebud in her button-hole—or whatever corresponds to the button-hole on the feminine bosom. I thought I discerned in this costume a vague intention of courtesy, of gaiety, of celebrating my arrival. I don't believe Miss Quarterman wears white muslin every day. She shook hands with me, and made me a pleasing little speech about their taking me in. "We have never had any inmates before," said she ; "and we are consequently new to the business. I don't know what you expect. I hope you don't expect a great deal. You must ask for anything you want. If we can give it, we shall be very glad to do so ; if we can't, I give you warning that we shall simply tell you so." Brava, Miss Quarterman ! The

best of it is, that she is decidedly beautiful—and in the grand manner; tall, and with roundness in her lines. What is the orthodox description of a pretty girl?—white and red? Miss Quarterman is not a pretty girl, she is a handsome woman. She leaves an impression of black and red; that is, she is a brunette with colour. She has a great deal of wavy black hair, which encircles her head like a dusky glory, a smoky halo. Her eyebrows, too, are black, but her eyes themselves are of a rich blue grey, the colour of those slate-cliffs which I saw yesterday, weltering under the tide. She has perfect teeth, and her smile is almost unnaturally brilliant. Her chin is surpassingly round. She has a capital movement, too, and looked uncommonly well as she strolled in the garden-path with a big spray of geranium lifted to her nose. She has very little to say, apparently; but when she speaks, it is to the point, and if the point suggests it, she doesn't hesitate to laugh very musically. Indeed, if she is not talkative, it is not from timidity. Is it from indifference? Time will elucidate this, as well as other mysteries. I cling to the hypothesis that she is amiable. She is, moreover, intelligent; she is probably fond of keeping herself *to herself*, as the phrase is, and is even, possibly, very proud. She is, in short, a woman of character. There you are, Miss Quarterman, at as full length as I can paint you. After tea she gave us some music in the parlour. I confess that I was more taken with the picture of the dusky little room, lighted by the single candle on the piano, and by her stately way of sitting at the instrument, than by the quality of her playing, though that is evidently high.

*June 18th.*—I have now been here almost a week. I occupy two very pleasant rooms. My painting-room is a large and rather bare apartment, with a very good north-light. I have decked it out with a

few old prints and sketches, and have already grown very fond of it. When I had disposed my artistic odds and ends so as to make it look as much like a studio as possible, I called in my hosts. The Captain snuffed about, silently, for some moments, and then inquired hopefully if I had ever tried my hand at a ship. On learning that I had not yet got to ships, he relapsed into a prudent reserve. His daughter smiled and questioned, very graciously, and called everything beautiful and delightful ; which rather disappointed me, as I had taken her to be a woman of some originality. She is rather a puzzle. Or is she, indeed, a very commonplace person, and the fault in me, who am for ever taking women to mean a great deal more than their Maker intended ? Regarding Miss Quarterman I have collected a few facts. She is not twenty-four, but twenty-seven years old. She has taught music ever since she was twenty, in a large boarding-school just out of the town, where she originally obtained her education. Her salary in this establishment, which is, I believe, a tolerably flourishing one, and the proceeds of a few additional lessons, constitute the chief revenues of the household. But the Captain fortunately owns his house, and his needs and habits are of the simplest kind. What does he or his daughter know of the great worldly theory of necessities, the great worldly scale of pleasures ? The young lady's only luxuries are a subscription to the circulating library, and an occasional walk on the beach, which, like one of Miss Brontë's heroines, she paces in company with an old Newfoundland dog. I am afraid she is sadly ignorant. She reads nothing but novels. I am bound to believe, however, that she has derived from the perusal of these works a certain second-hand acquaintance with life. " I read all the novels I can get," she said yesterday ; " but I only like the good ones. I do so

like *The Missing Bride*, which I have just finished." I must set her to work at some of the masters. I should like some of those fretful daughters of gold, in New York, to see how this woman lives. I wish, too, that half-a-dozen of *ces messieurs* of the clubs might take a peep at the present way of life of their humble servant. We breakfast at eight o'clock. Immediately afterwards Miss Quarterman, in a shabby old bonnet and shawl, starts off to school. If the weather is fine the Captain goes a-fishing, and I am left quite to my own devices. Twice I have accompanied the old man. The second time I was lucky enough to catch a big blue-fish, which we had for dinner. The Captain is an excellent specimen of the pure navigator, with his loose blue clothes, his ultra-divergent legs, his crisp white hair, his jolly thick-skinned visage. He comes of a seafaring English race. There is more or less of the ship's cabin in the general aspect of this antiquated house. I have heard the winds whistle about its walls, on two or three occasions, in true mid-ocean style. And then the illusion is heightened, somehow or other, by the extraordinary intensity of the light. My painting-room is a grand observatory of the clouds. I sit by the half-hour watching them sail past my high uncurtained windows. At the back part of the room something tells you that they belong to an ocean-sky ; and there, in truth, as you draw nearer, you behold the vast grey complement of sea. This quarter of the town is perfectly quiet. Human activity seems to have passed over it, never again to return, and to have left a deposit of melancholy resignation. The streets are clean, bright and airy ; but this fact only deepens the impression of vanished uses. It seems to say that the protecting heavens look down on their decline and can't help them. There is something ghostly in the perpetual stillness. We frequently

hear the rattling of the yards and the issuing of orders on the barques and schooners anchored out in the harbour.

*June 28th.*—My experiment works far better than I had hoped. I am thoroughly at my ease ; my peace of mind quite passeth understanding. I work diligently ; I have none but pleasant thoughts. The past has almost lost its bitterness. For a week, now, I have been out sketching daily. The Captain carries me to a certain point on the shore of the bay, I disembark and strike across the uplands to a spot where I have taken a kind of tryst with a particular effect of rock and shadow, which has been tolerably faithful to its appointment. Here I set up my easel, and paint till sunset. Then I retrace my steps and meet the boat. I am in every way much encouraged ; the horizon of my work grows perceptibly wider. And then I am inexpressibly happy in the conviction that I am not wholly unfit for a life of (moderate) industry and (comparative) privation. I am quite in love with my poverty, if I may call it so. And why should I not ? At this rate I don't spend eight hundred a year.

*July 12th.*—We have been having a week of bad weather : constant rain, night and day. This is certainly at once the brightest and the blackest spot in New England. The skies can smile, assuredly, but they have also lachrymal moods. I have been painting rather languidly, and at a great disadvantage, at my window. . . . Through all this pouring and pattering Miss Miriam—her name is Miriam, and it exactly fits her—sallies forth to her pupils. She envelops her beautiful head in a great woollen hood, her beautiful figure in a kind of feminine mackintosh ; her feet she puts into heavy clogs, and over the whole she balances a cotton umbrella. When she comes home, with the rain-drops glistening on her rich cheeks and her dark



lashes, her cloak bespattered with mud and her hands red with the cool damp, she is a very honourable figure. I never fail to make her a very low bow, for which she repays me with a familiar, but not a vulgar, nod. The working-day side of her character is what especially pleases me in Miss Quarterman. This holy working-dress sits upon her with the fine effect of an antique drapery. Little use has she for whalebones and furbelows. What a poetry there is, after all, in red hands ! I kiss yours, Mademoiselle. I do so because you are self-helpful ; because you earn your living ; because you are honest, simple, and ignorant (for a sensible woman, that is) ; because you speak and act to the point ; because, in short, you are so unlike—certain of your sisters.

*July 16th.*—On Monday it cleared up generously. When I went to my window, on rising, I found sky and sea looking, for their brightness and freshness, like a clever English water-colour. The ocean is of a deep purple blue ; above it, the pure, bright sky looks pale, though it hangs over the inland horizon a canopy of denser tissue. Here and there on the dark, breezy water gleams the white cap of a wave, or flaps the white cloak of a fishing-boat. I have been sketching sedulously ; I have discovered, within a couple of miles' walk, a large, lonely pond, set in a really grand landscape of barren rocks and grassy slopes. At one extremity is a broad outlook on the open sea ; at the other, buried in the foliage of an apple-orchard, stands an old haunted-looking farmhouse. To the west of the pond is a wide expanse of rock and grass, of sand and marsh. The sheep browse over it—poorly—as they might upon a Highland moor. Except a few stunted firs and cedars, there is not a tree in sight. When I want shade I have to look for it in the shelter of one of the large stones which hold up to the sun a shoulder coated



with delicate grey, figured over with fine, pale, sea-green moss, or else in one of the long, shallow dells where a tangle of blackberry-bushes hedges about a pool that reflects the sky. I am giving my best attention to a plain brown hillside, and trying to make it look like something in nature ; and as we have now had the same clear sky for several days, I have almost finished quite a satisfactory little study. I go forth immediately after breakfast. Miss Quarterman supplies me with a little parcel of bread and cold meat, which at the noonday hour, in my sunny solitude, within sight of the slumbering ocean, I voraciously convey to my lips with my discoloured fingers. At seven o'clock I return to tea, at which repast we each tell the story of our day's work. For poor Miss Quarterman it is always the same story : a wearisome round of visits to the school, and to the houses of the mayor, the parson, the butcher, the baker, whose young ladies, of course, all receive instruction on the piano. But she doesn't complain, nor, indeed, does she look very weary. When she has put on a fresh light dress for tea, and arranged her hair anew, and with these improvements flits about with the quiet hither and thither of her gentle footstep, preparing our evening meal, peeping into the teapot, cutting the solid loaf—or when, sitting down on the low door-step, she reads out select scraps from the evening paper—or else when, tea being over, she folds her arms (an attitude which becomes her mightily) and, still sitting on the door-step, gossips away the evening in comfortable idleness, while her father and I indulge in the fragrant pipe and watch the lights shining out, one by one, in different quarters of the darkening bay : at these moments she is as pretty, as cheerful, as careless as it becomes a sensible woman to be. What a pride the Captain takes in his daughter, and she, in return, how perfect is her devo-

tion to the old man! He is proud of her grace, of her tact, of her good sense, of her wit, such as it is. He believes her to be the most accomplished of women. He waits upon her as if, instead of his old familiar Miriam, she were some new arrival—say a daughter-in-law lately brought home. And *à propos* of daughters-in-law, if I were his own son he could not be kinder to me. They are certainly—nay, why should I not say it?—*we* are certainly a very happy little household. Will it last for ever? I say *we*, because both father and daughter have given me a hundred assurances—he direct, and she, if I don't flatter myself, after the manner of her sex, indirect—that I am already a valued friend. It is natural enough that they should like me, because I have tried to please them. The way to the old man's heart is through a studied consideration of his daughter. He knows, I imagine, that I admire Miss Quarterman, but if I should at any time fall below the mark of ceremony, I should have an account to settle with him. All this is as it should be. When people have to economise with the dollars and cents, they have a right to be splendid in their feelings. I have done my best to be nice to the stately Miriam without making love to her. That I haven't done *that*, however, is a fact which I do not, in any degree, set down here to my credit; for I would defy the most impertinent of men (whoever he is) to forget himself with this young lady. Those animated eyes have a power to keep people in their place. I mention the circumstance simply because in future years, when my charming friend shall have become a distant shadow, it will be pleasant, in turning over these pages, to find written testimony to a number of points which I shall be apt to charge solely upon my imagination. I wonder whether Miss Quarterman, in days to come, referring to the tables of her memory

for some trivial matter of fact, some prosaic date or half-buried landmark, will also encounter this little secret of ours, as I may call it—will decipher an old faint note to this effect, overlaid with the memoranda of intervening years. Of course she will. Sentiment aside, she is a woman of a retentive faculty. Whether she forgives or not I know not ; but she certainly doesn't forget. Doubtless, virtue is its own reward ; but there is a double satisfaction in being polite to a person on whom it tells !

Another reason for my pleasant relations with the Captain is, that I afford him a chance to rub up his rusty worldly lore and trot out his little scraps of old-fashioned reading, some of which are very curious. It is a great treat for him to spin his threadbare yarns over again to a submissive listener. These warm July evenings, in the sweet-smelling garden, are just the proper setting for his traveller's tales. An odd enough understanding subsists between us on this point. Like many gentlemen of his calling, the Captain is harassed by an irresistible desire to romance, even on the least promising themes ; and it is vastly amusing to observe how he will auscultate, as it were, his auditor's inmost mood, to ascertain whether it is in condition to be practised upon. Sometimes his artless fables don't "take" at all : they are very pretty, I conceive, in the deep and briny well of the Captain's fancy, but they won't bear being transplanted into the dry climate of my land-bred mind. At other times, the auditor being in a dreamy, sentimental, and altogether unprincipled mood, he will drink the old man's salt water by the bucketful and feel none the worse for it. Which is the worse, wilfully to tell, or wilfully to believe, a pretty little falsehood which will not hurt any one ? I suppose you can't believe wilfully ; you only pretend to believe. My part of the game, therefore, is

certainly as bad as the Captain's. Perhaps I take kindly to his beautiful perversions of fact because I am myself engaged in one, because I am sailing under false colours of the deepest dye. I wonder whether my friends have any suspicion of the real state of the case. How should they? I take for granted that I play my little part pretty well. I am delighted to find it comes so easy. I do not mean that I find little difficulty in foregoing my old luxuries and pleasures—for to these, thank heaven, I was not so indissolubly wedded that one wholesome shock could not loosen my bonds—but that I manage more cleverly than I expected to stifle those innumerable tacit allusions which might serve effectually to belie my character.

*Sunday, July 20th.*—This has been a very pleasant day for me; although in it, of course, I have done no manner of work. I had this morning a delightful *tête-à-tête* with my hostess. She had sprained her ankle coming down stairs, and so, instead of going forth to Sunday-school and to meeting, she was obliged to remain at home on the sofa. The Captain, who is of a very punctilious piety, went off alone. When I came into the parlour, as the church-bells were ringing, Miss Quarterman asked me if I never went to a place of worship.

"Never when there is anything better to do at home," said I.

"What is better than going to church?" she asked, with charming simplicity.

She was reclining on the sofa, with her foot on a pillow and her Bible in her lap. She looked by no means afflicted at having to be absent from divine service; and, instead of answering her question, I took the liberty of telling her so.

"I *am* sorry to be absent," said she. "You know it's my only festival in the week."

“ So you look upon it as a festival.”

“ Isn't it a pleasure to meet one's acquaintance ? I confess I am never deeply interested in the sermon, and I very much dislike teaching the children ; but I like wearing my best bonnet, and singing in the choir, and walking part of the way home with——”

“ With whom ? ”

“ With any one who offers to walk with me.”

“ With Mr. Prendergast, for instance,” said I.

Mr. Prendergast is a young lawyer in the village, who calls here once a week, and whose attentions to Miss Quarterman have been remarked.

“ Yes,” she answered, “ Mr. Prendergast will do as an instance.”

“ How he will miss you ! ”

“ I suppose he will. We sing off the same book. What are you laughing at ? He kindly permits me to hold the book, while he stands with his hands in his pockets. Last Sunday I quite lost patience. ‘ Mr. Prendergast,’ said I, ‘ do hold the book ! Where are your manners ? ’ He burst out laughing in the midst of the reading. He will certainly have to hold the book to-day.”

“ What a masterful soul he is ! I suppose he will call after meeting.”

“ Perhaps he will. I hope so.”

“ I hope he won't,” said I, frankly. “ I am going to sit down here and talk to you, and I wish our conversation not to be interrupted.”

“ Have you anything particular to say ? ”

“ Nothingso particular as Mr. Prendergast, perhaps.”

Miss Quarterman has a very pretty affectation of being more matter-of-fact than she really is.

“ His rights, then,” she remarked, “ are paramount to yours.”

“ Ah, you admit that he has rights ? ”

“ Not at all. I simply assert that you have none.”

" I beg your pardon. I have claims which I mean to enforce. I have a claim upon your undivided attention when I pay you a morning call."

" You have had all the attention I am capable of. Have I been so very rude ? "

" Not so very rude, perhaps, but rather inconsiderate. You have been sighing for the company of a third person, whom you can't expect me to care much about."

" Why not, pray ? If I, a lady, can put up with Mr. Prendergast's society, why shouldn't you, one of his own sex ? "

" Because he is so outrageously conceited. You, as a lady, or at any rate as a woman, like conceited men."

" Ah, yes ; I have no doubt that I, as a woman, have all kinds of weak tastes. That's a very old story."

" Admit, at any rate, that our friend is conceited."

" Admit it ! Why, I have said so a hundred times. I have told him so."

" Indeed, it has come to that, then ? "

" To what, pray ? "

" To that critical point in the friendship of a lady and gentleman when they bring against each other all kinds of delightful accusations and rebukes. Take care, Miss Quarterman ! A couple of intelligent New-Englanders, of opposite sexes, young, unmarried, are pretty far gone, when they begin to scan each other's faults. So you told Mr. Prendergast that he is conceited ? And I suppose you added that he was also dreadfully satirical and sceptical ? What was his rejoinder ? Let me see. Did he ever tell you that you were a wee bit affected ? "

" No ; he left that for you to say, in this very ingenious manner. Thank you, sir."



"He left it for me to deny, which is a great deal prettier. Do you think the manner ingenious?"

"I think the matter, considering the day and hour, very profane, Mr. Locksley. Suppose you go away and let me peruse my Bible."

"Meanwhile what shall I do?"

"Go and read yours, if you have one."

"My Bible," I said, "is the female mind."

I was nevertheless compelled to retire, with the promise of a second audience in half an hour. Poor Miss Quarterman owes it to her conscience to read a certain number of chapters. In what a terrible tradition she has been reared, and what an edifying spectacle is the piety of women! Women find a place for everything in their commodious little minds, just as they do in their wonderfully subdivided trunks when they go on a journey. I have no doubt that this young lady stows away her religion in a corner, just as she does her Sunday-bonnet—and, when the proper moment comes, draws it forth, and reflects, while she puts it on before the glass and blows away the strictly imaginary dust (for what worldly impurity can penetrate through half-a-dozen layers of cambric and tissue-paper?): "Dear me, what a comfort it is to have a nice, fresh holiday-creed!"—When I returned to the parlour Miriam was still sitting with her Bible in her lap. Somehow or other I no longer felt in the mood for jesting; so I asked her, without chaffing, what she had been reading, and she answered me in the same tone. She inquired how I had spent my half-hour.

"In thinking good Sabbath thoughts," I said. "I have been walking in the garden." And then I spoke my mind. "I have been thanking heaven that it has led me, a poor friendless wanderer, into so peaceful an anchorage."

"Are you so very poor and friendless?"



"Did you ever hear of an art-student who was not poor? Upon my word, I have yet to sell my first picture. Then, as for being friendless, there are not five people in the world who really care for me."

"*Really* care? I am afraid you look too close. And then I think five good friends is a very large number. I think myself very well off with half a one. But if you are friendless, it's probably your own fault."

"Perhaps it is," said I, sitting down in the rocking-chair; "and also, perhaps it isn't. Have you found me so very difficult to live with? Haven't you, on the contrary, found me rather sociable?"

She folded her arms, and quietly looked at me for a moment, before answering. I shouldn't wonder if I blushed a little.

"You want a lump of sugar, Mr. Locksley; that's the long and short of it. I haven't given you one since you have been here. How you must have suffered! But it's a pity you couldn't have waited a while longer, instead of beginning to put out your paws and bark. For an artist, you are very slapdash. Men never know how to wait. 'Have I found you very difficult to live with? haven't I found you sociable?' Perhaps, after all, considering what I have in my mind, it is as well that you asked for your lump of sugar. I have found you very indulgent. You let us off easily, but you wouldn't like us a bit if you didn't pity us. Don't I go deep? Sociable? ah, well, no—decidedly not! You are entirely too particular. You are considerate of me, because you know that I know that you are so. There's the rub, you see: I know that you know that I know it! Don't interrupt me; I am going to be striking. I want you to understand why I don't consider you sociable. You call poor Mr. Prendergast conceited; but, really, I believe he has more humility than you.

He envies my father and me—thinks us so cultivated. You don't envy any one, and yet I don't think you're a saint. You treat us kindly because you think virtue in a lowly station ought to be encouraged. Would you take the same amount of pains for a person you thought your equal, a person equally averse with yourself to being under an obligation? There are differences. Of course it's very delightful to fascinate people. Who wouldn't? There is no harm in it, as long as the fascinator doesn't set up for a public benefactor. If I were a man, a clever man like yourself, who had seen the world, who was not to be dazzled and encouraged, but to be listened to, counted with, would you be equally amiable? It will perhaps seem absurd to you, and it will certainly seem egotistical, but I consider myself sociable, for all that I have only a couple of friends—my father and Miss Blankenberg. That is, I mingle with people without any *arrière-pensée*. Of course the people I see are mainly women. Not that I wish you to do so: on the contrary, if the contrary is agreeable to you. But I don't believe you mingle in the same way with men. You may ask me what I know about it! Of course I know nothing; I simply guess. When I have done, indeed, I mean to beg your pardon for all I have said; but until then, give me a chance. You are incapable of exposing yourself to be bored, whereas I take it as my waterproof takes the rain. You have no idea what heroism I show in the exercise of my profession! Every day I have occasion to pocket my pride and to stifle my sense of the ridiculous—of which of course you think I haven't a bit. It is for instance a constant vexation to me to be poor. It makes me frequently hate rich women; it makes me despise poor ones. I don't know whether you suffer acutely from the smallness of your own means; but if you do, I daresay you

shun rich men. I don't, I like to bleed ; to go into rich people's houses, and to be very polite to the ladies, especially if they are very much dressed, very ignorant and vulgar. All women are like me in this respect, and all men more or less like you. That is, after all, the text of my sermon. Compared with us it has always seemed to me that you are arrant cowards—that we alone are brave. To be sociable you must have a great deal of patience. You are too fine a gentleman. Go and teach school, or open a corner-grocery, or sit in a law-office all day, waiting for clients : then you will be sociable. As yet you are only selfish. It is your own fault if people don't care for you ; you don't care for them. That you should be indifferent to their good opinion is all very well ; but you don't care for their indifference. You are amiable, you are very kind, and you are also very lazy. You consider that you are working now, don't you ? Many persons would not call it work."

It was now certainly my turn to fold my arms.

"And now," added my companion, as I did so, "be so good as to excuse me."

"This was certainly worth waiting for," said I. "I don't know what answer to make. My head swims. Sugar, did you say ? I don't know whether you have been giving me sugar or vitriol. So you advise me to open a corner-grocery, do you ?"

"I advise you to do something that will make you a little less satirical. You had better marry, for instance."

"*Je ne demande pas mieux.* Will you have me ? I can't afford it."

"Marry a rich woman."

I shook my head.

"Why not ?" asked Miss Quarterman. "Because people would accuse you of being mercenary ? What of that ? I mean to marry the first rich man who

offers. Do you know that I am tired of living alone in this weary old way, teaching little girls their scales, and turning and patching my dresses? I mean to marry the first man who offers."

"Even if he is poor?"

"Even if he is poor and has a hump."

"I am your man, then. Would you take me if I were to offer?"

"Try and see."

"Must I get upon my knees?"

"No, you needn't even do that. Am I not on mine? It would be too fine an irony. Remain as you are, lounging back in your chair, with your thumbs in your waistcoat."

If I were writing a romance now, instead of transcribing facts, I would say that I knew not what might have happened at this juncture had not the door opened and admitted the Captain and Mr. Prendergast. The latter was in the highest spirits.

"How are you, Miss Miriam? So you have been breaking your leg, eh? How are you, Mr. Locksley? I wish I were a doctor now. Which is it, right or left?"

In this simple fashion he made himself agreeable to Miss Miriam. He stopped to dinner and talked without ceasing. Whether our hostess had talked herself out in her very animated address to myself an hour before, or whether she preferred to oppose no obstacle to Mr. Prendergast's fluency, or whether she was indifferent to him, I know not; but she held her tongue with that easy grace, that charming tacit intimation of "We could if we would," of which she is so perfect a mistress. This very interesting woman has a number of pretty traits in common with her town-bred sisters; only, whereas in these they are laboriously acquired, in her they are richly natural. I am sure that, if I were to plant her in Madison Square to-morrow, she would, after one quick,

all-compassing glance, assume the *nil admirari* in a manner to drive the finest lady of them all to despair. Prendergast is a man of excellent intentions but no taste. Two or three times I looked at Miss Quarterman to see what impression his sallies were making upon her. They seemed to produce none whatever. But I know better, *moi*. Not one of them escaped her. But I suppose she said to herself that her impressions on this point were no business of mine. Perhaps she was right. It is a disagreeable word to use of a woman you admire ; but I can't help fancying that she has been a little soured. By what ? Who shall say ? By some old love-affair, perhaps.

*July 24th.*—This evening the Captain and I took a half-hour's turn about the port. I asked him frankly, as a friend, whether Prendergast wants to marry his daughter.

"I guess he does," said the old man, "and yet I hope he don't. You know what he is : he's smart, promising, and already sufficiently well off. But somehow he isn't for a man what my Miriam is for a female."

"That he isn't !" said I ; "and honestly, Captain Quarterman, I don't know who is——"

"Unless it be yourself," said the Captain.

"Thank you. I know a great many ways in which Mr. Prendergast is more worthy of her than I."

"And I know one in which you are more worthy of her than he—that is in being what we used to call one of the old sort."

"Miss Quarterman made him sufficiently welcome in her quiet way on Sunday," I rejoined.

"Oh, she respects him," said Quarterman. "As she's situated, she might marry him on that. You see, she's weary of hearing little girls drum on the piano. With her ear for music," added the Captain, "I wonder she has borne it so long."

"She is certainly meant for better things," said I.

"Well," answered the Captain, who has an honest habit of deprecating your agreement when it occurs to him that he has obtained it for sentiments which fall somewhat short of stoical—"well," said he, with a very dry, edifying expression, "she's born to do her duty. We are all of us born for that."

"Sometimes our duty is rather dismal," said I.

"So be it; but what's the help for it? I don't want to die without seeing my daughter provided for. What she makes by teaching is a pretty slim subsistence. There was a time when I thought she was going to be fixed for life, but it all blew over. There was a young fellow here, from down Boston way, who came about as near to it as you can come when you actually don't. He and Miriam were excellent friends. One day Miriam came up to me, and looked me in the face, and told me she had passed her word.

"'Who to?' says I, though of course I knew, and Miriam told me as much. 'When do you expect to marry?' I asked.

"'When Alfred'—his name was Alfred—'grows rich enough,' says she.

"'When will that be?'

"'It may not be for years,' said poor Miriam.

"A whole year passed, and, so far as I could see, the young man hadn't accumulated very much. He was for ever running to and fro between this place and Boston. I asked no questions, because I knew that my poor girl wished it so. But at last, one day, I began to think it was time to take an observation, and see whereabouts we stood.

"'Has Alfred made his little pile yet?' I asked.

"'I don't know, father,' said Miriam.

"'When are you to be married?'

"'Never!' said my poor little girl, and burst into



tears. 'Please ask me no questions,' said she. 'Our engagement is over. Ask me no questions.'

" 'Tell me one thing,' said I: 'where is that d——d scoundrel who has broken my daughter's heart?'

" 'You should have seen the look she gave me.

" 'Broken my heart, sir? You are very much mistaken. I don't know who you mean.'

" 'I mean Alfred Bannister,' said I. That was his name.

" 'I believe Mr. Bannister is in China,' says Miriam, as grand as the Queen of Sheba. And there was an end of it. I never learnt the ins and outs of it. I have been told that Bannister is amassing considerable wealth in the China-trade."

*August 7th.*—I have made no entry for more than a fortnight. They tell me I have been very ill; and I find no difficulty in believing them. I suppose I took cold, sitting out so late, sketching. At all events, I have had a mild intermittent fever. I have slept so much, however, that the time has seemed rather short. I have been tenderly nursed by this kind old mariner, his daughter, and his black domestic. God bless them, one and all! I say his daughter, because old Cynthia informs me that for half an hour one morning, at dawn, after a night during which I had been very feeble, Miss Quarterman relieved guard at my bedside, while I lay sleeping like a log. It is very jolly to see sky and ocean once again. I have got myself into my easy-chair, by the best window, with my shutters closed and the lattice open; and here I sit with my book on my knee, scratching away feebly enough. Now and then I peep from my cool, dark sick-chamber out into the world of light. High noon at midsummer—what a spectacle! There are no clouds in the sky, no waves on the ocean, the sun has it all to himself. To look long at the garden



makes the eyes water. And we—"Hobbs, Nobbs, Stokes and Nokes"—propose to paint that luminosity. *Allons donc!*

The handsomest of women has just tapped, and come in with a plate of early peaches. The peaches are of a gorgeous colour and plumpness; but Miss Quarterman looks pale and thin. The hot weather doesn't agree with her, and besides she is over-worked. Damn her drudgery! Of course I thanked her warmly for her attentions during my illness. She disclaims all gratitude, and refers me to her father and the dusky Cynthia.

"I allude more especially," I said, "to that little hour at the end of a weary night when you stole in, like a kind of moral Aurora, and drove away the shadows from my brain. That morning, you know, I began to get better."

"It was indeed a very little hour," said Miss Quarterman, colouring. "It was about ten minutes." And then she began to scold me for presuming to touch a pen during my convalescence. She laughs at me, indeed, for keeping a diary at all. "Of all things, a sentimental man is the most despicable!" she exclaimed.

I confess I was somewhat nettled—the thrust seemed gratuitous.

"Of all things a woman without sentiment is the most wanting in sweetness."

"Sentiment and sweetness are all very well when you have time for them," said Miss Quarterman. "I haven't. I am not rich enough. Good morning!"

Speaking of another woman, I would say that she flounced out of the room. But such was the gait of Juno when she moved stiffly over the grass from where Paris stood with Venus holding the apple, gathering up her divine vestment and leaving the others to guess at her face.

Juno has just come back to say that she forgot what she came for half an hour ago. What will I be pleased to like for dinner?

"I have just been writing in my diary that you flounced out of the room," said I.

"Have you, indeed? Now you can write that I have bounced in. There's a nice cold chicken downstairs," etc. etc.

*August 14th.*—This afternoon I sent for a light vehicle, and treated Miss Quarterman to a drive. We went successively over the three beaches. What a spin we had coming home! I shall never forget that breezy trot over Weston's Beach. The tide was very low, and we had the whole glittering, weltering strand to ourselves. There was a heavy blow last night, which has not yet subsided, and the waves have been lashed into a magnificent fury. Trot, trot, trot, trot, we trundled over the hard sand. The sound of the horse's hoofs rang out sharp against the monotone of the thunderous surf, as we drew nearer and nearer to the long line of the cliffs. At our left, almost from the zenith of the pale evening sky to the high western horizon of the tumultuous dark-green sea, was suspended, so to speak, one of those gorgeous vertical sunsets that Turner sometimes painted. It was a splendid confusion of purple and green and gold—the clouds flying and floating in the wind like the folds of a mighty banner borne by some triumphal fleet which had rounded the curve of the globe. As we reached the point where the cliffs begin I pulled up, and we remained for some time looking at their long, diminishing, crooked perspective, blue and dun as it receded, with the white surge playing at their feet.

*August 17th.*—This evening, as I lighted my bedroom-candle, I saw that the Captain had something to say to me. So I waited below until my host and

his daughter had performed their usual osculation, and the latter had given me that confiding hand-shake which I never fail to exact.

"Prendergast has got his discharge," said the old man, when he had heard his daughter's door close.

"What do you mean?"

He pointed with his thumb to the room above, where we heard, through the thin partition, the movement of Miss Quarterman's light step.

"You mean that he has proposed to Miss Miriam?"

The Captain nodded.

"And has been refused?"

"Flat."

"Poor fellow!" said I, very honestly. "Did he tell you himself?"

"Yes, with tears in his eyes. He wanted me to speak for him. I told him it was no use. Then he began to say hard things of my poor girl."

"What kind of things?"

"A pack of falsehoods. He says she has no heart. She has promised always to regard him as a friend; it's more than I will, hang him!"

"Poor fellow!" said I; and now, as I write, I can only repeat, considering what a hope was here disappointed, Poor fellow!

*August 23rd.*—I have been lounging about all day, thinking of it, dreaming of it, spooning over it, as they say. This is a decided waste of time. I think, accordingly, the best thing for me to do is to sit down and lay the ghost by writing out my little story.

On Thursday evening Miss Quarterman happened to intimate that she had a holiday on the morrow, it being the birthday of the lady in whose establishment she teaches.

"There is to be a tea-party at four o'clock in the afternoon for the resident pupils and teachers," Miriam said. "Tea at four! what do you think of that?"

And then there is to be a speech-making by the smartest young lady. As my services are not required I propose to be absent. Suppose, father, you take us out in your boat. Will you come, Mr. Locksley? We shall have a neat little picnic. Let us go over to old Fort Plunkett, across the bay. We will take our dinner with us, and send Cynthia to spend the day with her sister, and put the house-key in our pocket, and not come home till we please."

I entered into the project with passion, and it was accordingly carried into execution the next morning, when—about ten o'clock—we pushed off from our little wharf at the garden-foot. It was a perfect summer's day; I can say no more for it; and we made a quiet run over to the point of our destination. I shall never forget the wondrous stillness which brooded over earth and water as we weighed anchor in the lee of my old friend—or old enemy—the ruined fort. The deep, translucent water reposed at the base of the warm sunlit cliff like a great basin of glass, which I half expected to hear shiver and crack as our keel ploughed through it. And how colour and sound stood out in the translucent air! How audibly the little ripples on the beach whispered to the open sky. How our irreverent voices seemed to jar upon the privacy of the little cove! The delicate rocks doubled themselves without a flaw in the clear, dark water. The gleaming white beach lay fringed with its deep deposits of odorous seaweed, which looked like masses of black lace. The steep, straggling sides of the cliffs lifted their rugged angles against the burning blue of the sky. I remember, when Miss Quarterman stepped ashore and stood upon the beach, relieved against the cool darkness of a recess in the cliff, while her father and I busied ourselves with gathering up our baskets and fastening the anchor—I remember, I say, what a picture she made. There

is a certain purity in the air of this place which I have never seen surpassed—a lightness, a brilliancy, a crudity, which allows perfect liberty of self-assertion to each individual object in the landscape. The prospect is ever more or less like a picture which lacks its final process, its reduction to unity. Miss Quarterman's figure, as she stood there on the beach, was almost *criarde*; but how it animated the whole scene! Her light muslin dress, gathered up over her white petticoat, her little black mantilla, the blue veil which she had knotted about her neck, the little silken dome which she poised over her head in one gloved hand, while the other retained her crisp draperies, and which cast down upon her face a sharp circle of shade, where her cheerful eyes shone darkly and her parted lips said things I lost—these are some of the points I hastily noted.

"Young woman," I cried out, over the water, "I do wish you might know how pretty you look!"

"How do you know I don't?" she answered. "I should think I might. You don't look so badly yourself. But it's not I; it's the aerial perspective."

"Hang it—I am going to become profane!" I called out again.

"Swear ahead," said the Captain.

"I am going to say you are infernally handsome."

"Dear me! is that all?" cried Miss Quarterman, with a little light laugh which must have made the tutelar sirens of the cove ready to die with jealousy down in their submarine bowers.

By the time the Captain and I had landed our effects our companion had tripped lightly up the forehead of the cliff—in one place it is very retreating—and disappeared over its crown. She soon returned, with an intensely white pocket-handkerchief added to her other provocations, which she waved to us, as we trudged upward, carrying our baskets. When

we stopped to take breath on the summit and wipe our foreheads, we of course rebuked her for roaming about idly with her parasol and gloves.

"Do you think I am going to take any trouble or do any work?" cried Miss Miriam, in the greatest good-humour. "Is not this my holiday? I am not going to raise a finger, nor soil these beautiful gloves, for which I paid so much at Mr. Dawson's at Chowder-ville. After you have found a shady place for your provisions, I should like you to look for a spring. I am very thirsty."

"Find the spring yourself, miss," said her father. "Mr. Locksley and I have a spring in this basket. Take a pull, sir."

And the Captain drew forth a stout black bottle.

"Give me a cup, and I will look for some water," said Miriam. "Only I'm so afraid of the snakes! If you hear a scream you may know it's a snake."

"Screaming snakes!" said I; "that's a new species."

What cheap fun it all sounds now! As we looked about us shade seemed scarce, as it generally is in this region. But Miss Quarterman, like the very adroit and practical young person she is, for all that she would have me believe the contrary, immediately discovered flowing water in the shelter of a pleasant little dell, beneath a clump of firs. Hither, as one of the young gentlemen who imitate Tennyson would say, we brought our basket, he and I; while Miriam dipped the cup, and held it dripping to our thirsty lips, and laid the cloth, and on the grass disposed the platters round. I should have to be a poet, indeed, to describe half the happiness and the silly sweetness and artless revelry of this interminable summer's day. We ate and drank and talked; we ate occasionally with our fingers, we drank out of the necks of our bottles, and we talked with our



mouths full, as befits (and excuses) those who talk perfect nonsense. We told stories without the least point. The Captain and I made atrocious puns. I believe, indeed, that Miss Quarterman herself made one little punkin, as I called it. If there had been any superfluous representative of humanity present to notice the fact, I should say that we made fools of ourselves. But as there was no one to criticise us we were brilliant enough. I am conscious myself of having said several witty things, which Miss Quarterman understood: *in vino veritas*. The dear old Captain twanged the long bow indefatigably. The bright high sun dawdled above us, in the same place, and drowned the prospect with light and warmth. One of these days I mean to paint a picture which, in future ages, when my dear native land shall boast a national school of art, will hang in the Salon Carré of the great central museum (located, let us say, in Chicago) and recall to folks—or rather make them forget—Giorgione, Bordone, and Veronese: A Rural Festival; three persons feasting under some trees; scene, nowhere in particular; time and hour, problematical. Female figure, a rich *brune*; young man reclining on his elbow; old man drinking. An empty sky, with no end of expression. The whole stupendous in colour, drawing, feeling. Artist uncertain; supposed to be Robinson, 1900.

After dinner the Captain began to look out across the bay, and, noticing the uprising of a little breeze, expressed a wish to cruise about for an hour or two. He proposed to us to walk along the shore to a point a couple of miles northward, and there meet the boat. His daughter having agreed to this proposition, he set off with the lightened hamper, and in less than half an hour we saw him standing out from shore. Miss Quarterman and I did not begin our walk for a long, long time. We sat and talked beneath the



trees. At our feet a wide cleft in the hills—almost a glen—stretched down to the silent beach ; beyond lay the familiar ocean-line. But, as many philosophers have observed, there is an end to all things. At last we got up. My companion remarked that, as the air was freshening, she supposed she ought to put on her shawl. I helped her to fold it into the proper shape, and then I placed it on her shoulders ; it being an old shawl of faded red (Canton crape, I believe they call it), which I have seen very often. And then she tied her veil once more about her neck, and gave me her hat to hold, while she effected a partial redistribution of her hair-pins. By way of being humorous, I spun her hat round on my stick ; at which she was kind enough to smile, as with downcast face and uplifted elbows she fumbled among her braids. And then she shook out the creases of her dress and drew on her gloves ; and finally she said, “ Well ! ”—that inevitable tribute to time and morality which follows upon even the mildest forms of dissipation. Very slowly it was that we wandered down the little glen. Slowly, too, we followed the course of the narrow and sinuous beach, as it keeps to the foot of the low cliffs. We encountered no sign of human life. Our conversation I need hardly repeat. I think I may trust it to the keeping of my memory ; it was the sort of thing that comes back to one—after. If something ever happens which I think *may*, that apparently idle hour will seem, as one looks back, very symptomatic, and what we didn’t say be perceived to have been more significant than what we did. There was something between us—there *is* something between us—and we listened to its palpable presence—I liken it to the hum (very faint) of an unseen insect—in the golden stillness of the afternoon. I must add that if she expects, foresees, if she waits, she does so with a

supreme serenity. If she is my fate (and she has the air of it), she is conscious that it's *her* fate to be so.

*September 1st.*—I have been working steadily for a week. This is the first day of autumn. Read aloud to Miss Quarterman a little Wordsworth.

*September 10th. Midnight.*—Worked without interruption—until yesterday, inclusive, that is. But with the day now closing—or opening—begins a new era. My poor vapid old diary, at last you shall hold a *fact*.

For three days past we have been having damp, autumnal weather ; dusk has gathered early. This evening, after tea, the Captain went into town—on business, as he said : I believe, to attend some Poorhouse or Hospital Board. Miriam and I went into the parlour. The place seemed cold ; she brought in the lamp from the dining-room, and proposed we should have a little fire. I went into the kitchen, procured half-a-dozen logs, and, while she drew the curtains and wheeled up the table, I kindled a lively, crackling blaze. A fortnight ago she would not have allowed me to do this without a protest. She would not have offered to do it herself—not she !—but she would have said that I was not here to serve, but to be served, and would at least have made a show of calling the negress. I should have had my own way, but we have changed all that. Miriam went to her piano, and I sat down to a book. I read not a word, but sat considering my fate and watching it come nearer and nearer. For the first time since I have known her (my fate) she had put on a dark, warm dress ; I think it was of the material called alpaca. The first time I saw her (I remember such things) she wore a white dress with a blue neck-ribbon ; now she wore a black dress with the same ribbon. That is, I remember wondering, as I sat there eyeing her, whether it *was* the same ribbon,

or merely another like it. My heart was in my throat ; and yet I thought of a number of trivialities of the same kind. At last I spoke.

" Miss Quarterman," I said, " do you remember the first evening I passed beneath your roof, last June ? "

" Perfectly," she replied, without stopping.

" You played the same piece."

" Yes ; I played it very badly, too. I only half knew it. But it is a showy piece, and I wished to produce an effect. I didn't know then how indifferent you are to music."

" I paid no particular attention to the piece. I was intent upon the performer."

" So the performer supposed."

" What reason had you to suppose so ? "

" I am sure I don't know. Did you ever know a woman to be able to give a reason when she has guessed aright ? "

" I think they generally contrive to make up a reason afterwards. Come, what was yours ? "

" Well, you stared so hard."

" Fie ! I don't believe it. That's unkind."

" You said you wished me to invent a reason. If I really had one, I don't remember it."

" You told me you remembered the occasion in question perfectly."

" I meant the circumstances. I remember what we had for tea ; I remember what dress I wore. But I don't remember my feelings. They were naturally not very memorable."

" What did you say when your father proposed that I should come here ? "

" I asked how much you would be willing to pay ? "

" And then ? "

" And then, if you looked respectable."

" And then ? "

"That was all. I told my father to do as he pleased."

She continued to play, and leaning back in my chair I continued to look at her. There was a considerable pause.

"Miss Quarterman," said I, at last.

"Well, sir?"

"Excuse me for interrupting you so often. But"—and I got up and went to the piano—"but, you know, I thank heaven that it has brought you and me together."

She looked up at me and bowed her head with a little smile, as her hands still wandered over the keys.

"Heaven has certainly been very good to us," said she.

"How much longer are you going to play?" I asked.

"I'm sure I don't know. As long as you like."

"If you want to do as I like, you will stop immediately."

She let her hands rest on the keys a moment, and gave me a rapid, questioning look. Whether she found a sufficient answer in my face I know not; but she slowly rose, and, with a very pretty affectation of obedience, began to close the instrument. I helped her to do so.

"Perhaps you would like to be quite alone," she said. "I suppose your own room is too cold."

"Yes," I answered, "you have hit it exactly. I wish to be alone. I wish to monopolise this cheerful blaze. Hadn't you better go into the kitchen and sit with the cook? It takes you women to make such cruel speeches."

"When we women are cruel, Mr. Locksley, it is the merest accident. We are not wilfully so. When we learn that we have been unkind we very humbly

ask pardon, without even knowing what our crime has been." And she made me a very low curtsy.

"I will tell you what your crime has been," said I. "Come and sit by the fire. It's rather a long story."

"A long story? Then let me get my work."

"Confound your work! Excuse me, but you exasperate me. I want you to listen to me. Believe me, you will need all your attention."

She looked at me steadily a moment, and I returned her glance. During that moment I was reflecting whether I might put my arm round her waist and kiss her; but I decided that I might do nothing of the sort. She walked over and quietly seated herself in a low chair by the fire. Here she patiently folded her arms. I sat down before her.

"With you, Miss Quarterman," said I, "one must be very explicit. You are not in the habit of taking things for granted. You have a great deal of imagination, but you rarely exercise it on the behalf of other people."

"Is that my crime?" asked my companion.

"It's not so much a crime as a vice, and perhaps not so much a vice as a virtue. Your crime is, that you are so stone-cold to a poor devil who loves you."

She burst into rather a shrill laugh. I wonder whether she thought I meant Prendergast.

"Who are you speaking for, Mr. Locksley?" she asked.

"Are there so many? For myself."

"Honestly?"

"Do you think me capable of deceiving you?"

"What is that French phrase that you are for ever using? I think I may say '*Allons donc!*'"

"Let us speak plain English, Miss Quarterman."

"'Stone-cold' is certainly very plain English. I

don't see the relative importance of the two branches of your proposition. Which is the principal, and which the subordinate clause—that I am stone-cold, as you call it, or that you love me, as you call it? ”

“ As I call it? What would you have me call it? For pity's sake, Miss Quarterman, be serious, or I shall call it something else. Yes, I love you. Don't you believe it? ”

“ How can I help believing what you tell me? ”

“ Dearest, bravest of women,” said I.

And I attempted to take her hand.

“ No, no, Mr. Locksley,” said she—“ not just yet, if you please.”

“ Actions speak louder than words,” said I.

“ There is no need of speaking loud. I hear you perfectly.”

“ I certainly shall not whisper,” said I; “ although it is the custom, I believe, for lovers to do so. Will you be my wife? ”

I don't know whether *she* whispered or not, but before I left her she consented.

*September 12th.*—We are to be married in about three weeks.

*September 19th.*—I have been in New York a week, transacting business. I got back yesterday. I find every one here talking about our engagement. Miriam tells me that it was talked about a month ago, and that there is a very general feeling of disappointment that I am so very poor.

“ Really, if you don't mind it,” I remarked, “ I don't see why others should.”

“ I don't know whether you are poor or not,” says Miriam, “ but I know that I am rich.”

“ Indeed! I was not aware that you had a private fortune,” etc. etc.

This little farce is repeated in some shape every



day. I am very idle. I smoke a great deal, and lounge about all day, with my hands in my pockets. I am free from that ineffable weariness of ceaseless *buying* which I suffered from six months ago. That intercourse was conducted by means of little parcels, and I have resolved that this engagement, at all events, shall have no connexion with the shops. I was cheated of my poetry once ; I shan't be a second time. Fortunately there is not much danger of this, for my mistress is positively lyrical. She takes an enthusiastic interest in her simple outfit—showing me triumphantly certain of her purchases, and making a great mystery about others, which she is pleased to denominate table-cloths and napkins. Last evening I found her sewing buttons on a table-cloth. I had heard a great deal of a certain pink silk dress, and this morning, accordingly, she marched up to me, arrayed in this garment, upon which all the art and taste and eyesight, and all the velvet and lace, of Chowderville have been lavished.

“ There is only one objection to it,” said Miriam, parading before the glass in my painting-room : “ I am afraid it is above our station.”

“ By Jove ! I will paint your portrait in it and make our fortune,” said I. “ All the other men who have handsome wives will bring them to be painted.”

“ You mean all the women who have handsome dresses,” Miriam replied, with great humility.

Our wedding is fixed for next Thursday. I tell Miriam that it will be as little of a wedding, and as much of a marriage, as possible. Her father and her good friend Miss Blankenberg (the school-mistress) alone are to be present. My secret oppresses me considerably ; but I have resolved to keep it for the honeymoon, when it may leak out as occasion helps it. I am harassed with a dismal apprehension that



if Miriam were to discover it now, the whole thing would have to be done over again. I have taken rooms at a romantic little watering-place called Cragthorpe, ten miles off. The hotel is already quite purged of cockneys, and we shall be almost alone.

*September 28th.*—We have been here two days. The little transaction in the church went off smoothly. I am truly sorry for the Captain. We drove directly over here, and reached the place at dusk. It was a raw, black day. We have a couple of good rooms, close to the savage sea. I am nevertheless afraid I have made a mistake. It would perhaps have been wiser to go to New York. These things are not immaterial ; we make our own heaven, but we scarcely make our own earth. I am writing at a little table by the window, looking out on the rocks, the gathering dusk, the rising fog. My wife has wandered down to the rocky platform in front of the house. I can see her from here, bareheaded, in that old crimson shawl, talking to one of the landlord's little boys. She has just given the infant a kiss, bless her tender heart ! I remember her telling me once that she was very fond of little boys ; and, indeed, I have noticed that they are seldom too dirty for her to take on her knee. I have been reading over these pages for the first time in—I don't know when. They are filled with *her*—even more in thought than in word. I believe I will show them to her when she comes in. I will give her the book to read, and sit by her, watching her face—watching the great secret dawn upon her.

*Later.*—Somehow or other, I can write this quietly enough ; but I hardly think I shall ever write any more. When Miriam came in I handed her this book.

“ I want you to read it,” said I.

She turned very pale, and laid it on the table, shaking her head.

"I know it," she said.

"What do you know?"

"That you have ever so much money. But believe me, Mr. Locksley, I am none the worse for the knowledge. You intimated in one place in your book that I am fitted by nature for wealth and splendour. I verily believe I am. You pretend to hate your money; but you would not have had me without it. If you really love me—and I think you do—you will not let this make any difference. I am not such a fool as to attempt to talk now about what passed through me when you asked me to do *this*. But I remember what I said."

"What do you expect me to do?" I asked. "Shall I call you some horrible name and cast you off?"

"I expect you to show the same courage that I am showing. I never said I loved you. I never deceived you in that. I said I would be your wife. So I will, faithfully. I haven't so much heart as you think; and yet, too, I have a great deal more. I am incapable of more than one deception.—Mercy! didn't you see it? didn't you know it? see that I saw it? know that I knew it? It was diamond cut diamond. You cheated me and I mystified you. Now that you tell me your secret I can tell you mine. *Now* we are free, with the fortune that you know. Excuse me, but it sometimes comes over me! *Now* we can be good and honest and true. It was all a make-believe virtue before."

"So you read that thing?" I asked: actually—strange as it may seem—for something to say.

"Yes, while you were ill. It was lying with your pen in it, on the table. I read it because I suspected. Otherwise I wouldn't have done so."

“It was the act of a false woman,” said I.

“A false woman? No, it was the act of any woman—placed as I was placed. You don’t believe it?” And she began to smile. “Come, you may abuse me in your diary if you like—I shall never peep into it again!”



ROSE-AGATHE



I HAD invited the excellent fellow to dinner, and had begun to wonder, the stroke of half-past six having sounded, why he did not present himself. At last I stepped out upon the balcony and looked along the street in the direction from which, presumably, he would approach. A Parisian thoroughfare is always an entertaining spectacle, and I had still much of a stranger's alertness of attention. Before long, therefore, I quite forgot my unpunctual guest in my relish of the multifarious animation of the brilliant city. It was a perfect evening, toward the end of April ; there was a charming golden glow on the opposite house-tops, which looked toward the west ; there was a sort of vernal odour in the street, mingling with the emanations of the restaurant across the way, whose door now always stood open ; with the delightful aroma of the chocolate-shop which occupied the ground-floor of the house in whose *entresol* I was lodged ; and, as I fancied, with certain luscious perfumes hovering about the brilliantly-polished window of the hairdresser's establishment, adjacent to the restaurant. It had above it the sign, " Anatole, Coiffeur " ; these artists, in Paris, being known only by their Christian name. Then there was a woman in a minutely-fluted cap, selling violets in a little handcart which she gently pushed along over the smooth asphalt, and which, as she passed, left a sensible trace in the thick, mild air. All this made a thoroughly Parisian mixture, and I envied Sanguinetti the privilege of spending his life in a city in which



even the humblest of one's senses is the medium of poetic impressions. There was poetry in the warm, succulent exhalations of the opposite restaurant, where, among the lighted lamps, I could see the little tables glittering with their glass and silver, the tenderly-brown rolls nestling in the petals of the folded napkins, the waiters, in their snowy aprons, standing in the various attitudes of imminent eagerness, the agreeable *dame de comptoir* sitting idle for the moment and rubbing her plump white hands. To a person so inordinately fond of chocolate as myself—there was literally a pretty little box, half-emptied of large soft globules of the compound, standing at that moment on my table—there was of course something very agreeable in the faint upward gusts of the establishment in my *rez-de-chaussée*. Presently, too, it appeared to me that the savours peculiar to the hairdressing-shop had assumed an extraordinary intensity, and that my right-hand nostril was exposed to the titillation of a new influence. It was as if a bottle of the finest hair-oil had suddenly been uncorked. Glancing that way again, I perceived the source of this rich effluvium. The hairdresser's door was open, and a person whom I supposed to be his wife had come to inhale upon the threshold the lighter atmosphere of the street. She stood there for some moments, looking up and down, and I had time to see that she was very pretty. She wore a plain black silk dress, and one needed to know no more of millinery than most men to observe that it was admirably fitted to a charming figure. She had a little knot of pink ribbon at her throat and a bunch of violets in her rounded bosom. Her face seemed to me at once beautiful and lively—two merits that are not always united; for smiles, I have observed, are infrequent with women who are either very ugly or very pretty. Her light-brown hair was, naturally enough, dressed

with consummate art, and the character of her beauty being suggestive of purity and gentleness, she looked (her black silk dress apart) like a Madonna who should have been *coiffée* by M. Anatole. What a delightful person for a barber's wife, I thought ; and I saw her sitting in the little front shop, at the desk, and taking the money with a gracious smile from the gentlemen who had been having their whiskers trimmed in the inner sanctuary. I touched my own whiskers, and straightway decided that they needed trimming. In a few moments this lovely woman stepped out upon the pavement, and strolled along, in front of the shop-window, on a little tour of inspection. She stood there a moment, looking at the brilliant array of brightly-capped *flacons*, of ivory toilet-implements, of detached human tresses disposed in every variety of fashionable convolution : she inclined her head to one side and gently stroked her chin. I was able to perceive that even with her back turned she was hardly less pretty than when seen in front—her back had, as they say, so much *chic*. The inclination of her head denoted contentment, even complacency ; and, indeed, well it might, for the window was most artistically arranged. Its principal glory was conferred by two waxen heads of lovely ladies, such as are usually seen in hairdressers' windows ; and these wig-wearing puppets, which maintained a constant rotary movement, seemed to be a triumph of the modeller's art. One of the revolving ladies was dark, and the other fair, and each tossed back her head and thrust out her waxen bosom and parted her rosy lips in the most stylish manner conceivable. Several persons, passing by, had stopped to admire them. In a few moments a second inmate came to the door of the shop, and said a word to the barber's pretty wife. This was not the barber himself, but a young woman apparently employed in the shop. She was a nice-

looking young woman enough, but she had by no means the beauty of her companion, who, to my regret, on hearing her voice, instantly went in.

After this I fell to watching something else, I forget what: I had quite forgotten Sanguinetti. I think I was looking at a gentleman and lady who had come into the restaurant and placed themselves near the great sheet of plate-glass which separated the interior from the street. The lady, who had the most wonderfully arched eyebrows, was evidently ordering the dinner, and I was struck with the profusion of its items. At last she began to eat her soup, with her little finger very much curled out, and then my gaze wandered toward the hairdresser's window again. This circumstance reminded me that I was really very good-natured to be waiting so placidly for that dilatory Sanguinetti. There he stood in front of the coiffeur's, staring as intently and serenely into the window as if he had the whole evening before him. I waited a few moments, to give him a chance to move on, but he remained there, gaping like a rustic at a fair. What in the world was he looking at? Had he spied something that could play a part in his collection? For Sanguinetti was a collector, and had a room full of old crockery and uncomfortable chairs. But he cared for nothing that was not a hundred years old, and the pretty things in the hairdresser's window all bore the stamp of the latest Parisian manufacture—were part and parcel of that modern rubbish which he so cordially despised. What then had so forcibly arrested his attention? Was the poor fellow thinking of buying a new chignon, or a solitary pendent curl, for the object of his affections? This could hardly be, for to my almost certain knowledge his affections had no object save the faded crockery and the angular chairs I have mentioned. I had, indeed, more than once thought it a pity that

he should not interest himself in some attractive little woman ; for he might end by marrying her, and that would be a blessing, inasmuch as she would probably take measures for his being punctual when he was asked out to dinner. I tapped on the edge of the little railing which served as my window-guard, but the noise of the street prevented this admonition from reaching his ear. He was decidedly quite too absorbed. Then I ventured to hiss at him in the manner of the Latin races—a mode of address to which I have always had a lively aversion, but which, it must be confessed, proceeding from Latin lips, reaches its destination in cases in which a nobler volume of sound will stop half way. Still, like the warrior's widow in Tennyson's song, he neither spake nor moved. But here, suddenly, I comprehended the motive of his immobility : he was looking of course at the barber's beautiful wife, the pretty woman with the face of a Madonna and the coiffure of a Parisienne, whom I myself had just found so charming. This was really an excuse, and I felt disposed to allow him a few moments' grace. There was evidently an unobstructed space behind the window, through which this attractive person could be perceived as she sat at her desk in some attitude of graceful diligence—adding up the items of a fine lady's little indebtedness for rouge-pots and rice-powder, or braiding ever so neatly the long tresses of a *fausse natte* of the fashionable colour. I promised myself to look out for this point of visual access the very first time I should pass.

I gave my tarrying guest another five minutes' grace, during which the lamps were lighted in the hairdresser's shop. The window now became extremely brilliant ; the ivory brushes and the little silver mirrors glittered and flashed, the coloured cosmetics in the little toilet-bottles acquired an almost

appetising radiance, and the beautiful waxen ladies, tossing back their heads more than ever from their dazzling busts, seemed to sniff up the agreeable atmosphere. Of course the hairdresser's wife had become even more vividly visible, and so, evidently, Sanguinetti was finding out. He moved no more than if he himself had been a barber's block. This was all very well, but now, seriously, I was hungry, and I felt extremely disposed to fling a flower-pot at him : I had an array of these ornaments in the balcony. Just then my servant came into the room, and beckoning to this functionary I pointed out to him the gentleman at the barber's window, and bade him go down into the street and interrupt Mr. Sanguinetti's contemplations. He departed, descended, and I presently saw him cross the way. Just as he drew near my friend, however, the latter turned round, abruptly, and looked at his watch. Then, with an obvious sense of alarm, he moved quickly forward ; but he had not gone five steps before he paused again and cast back a supreme glance at the object of his admiration. He raised his hand to his lips, and, upon my word, he looked as if he were kissing it. My servant now accosted him with a bow, and motioned toward my balcony ; but Sanguinetti, without looking up, simply passed quickly across to my door. He might well be shy about looking up—kissing his hand in the street to pretty *dames de comptoir* : for a modest little man, who was supposed to care for nothing but bric-à-brac, and not to be in the least what is called " enterprising " with women, this was certainly a very smart jump. And the hairdresser's wife ? Had she, on her side, been kissing her finger-tips to him ? I thought it very possible, and remembered that I had always heard that Paris is the city of gallantry.

Sanguinetti came in, blushing a good deal, and

saying that he was extremely sorry to have kept me waiting.

"Oh," I answered, "I understand it very well. I have been watching you from my window for the last quarter of an hour."

He smiled a little, blushing still. "Though I have lived in Paris for fifteen years," he said, "you know I always look at the shops. One never knows what one may pick up."

"You have a taste for picking up pretty faces," I rejoined. "That is certainly a very pretty one at the hairdresser's."

Poor Sanguinetti was really very modest; my "chaff" discomposed him, and he began to fidget and protest.

"Oh," I went on, "your choice does great honour to your taste. She's a very lovely creature; I admire her myself."

He looked at me a moment, with his soup-spoon poised. He was always a little afraid of me; he was sure I thought him a very flimsy fellow, with his passion for cracked teacups and scraps of old brocade. But now he seemed a trifle reassured; he would talk a little if he dared. "You know there are two of them," he said, "but one is much more beautiful than the other."

"Precisely," I answered—"the fair one."

"My dear friend," murmured my guest, "she is the most beautiful object I ever beheld."

"That, perhaps, is going a little too far. But she is uncommonly handsome."

"She is quite perfect," Sanguinetti declared, finishing his soup. And presently he added, "Shall I tell you what she looks like?"

"Like a fashionable angel," I said.

"Yes," he answered, smiling, "or like a Madonna who should have had her hair dressed—over there."



"My dear fellow," I exclaimed, "that is just the comparison I hit upon a while ago!"

"That proves the truth of it. It is a real Madonna type."

"A little Parisianised about the corners of the mouth," I rejoined.

"Possibly," said Sanguinetti. "But the mouth is her loveliest feature."

"Could you see her well?" I inquired, as I helped him to a sweetbread.

"Beautifully—especially after the gas was lighted."

"Had you never noticed her before?"

"Never, strangely enough. But though, as I say, I am very fond of shop-windows, I confess to always having had a great prejudice against those of the hairdressers."

"You see how wrong you were."

"No, not in general; this is an exception. The women are usually hideous. They have the most impossible complexions; they are always fearfully sallow. There is one of them in my street, three doors from my own house: you would say she was made of——" And he paused a moment for his comparison. "You would say she was made of tallow."

We finished our sweetbreads, and, I think, talked of something else, my companion presently drawing from his pocket and exhibiting with some elation a little purchase in the antiquarian line which he had made that morning. It was a small coffee-cup, of the Sèvres manufacture and of the period of Louis XV., very delicately painted over with nosegays and garlands. I was far from being competent in such matters, but Sanguinetti assured me that it bore a certain little earmark which made it a precious acquisition. And he put it back into its little red morocco case, and fell a-musing while his eyes wan-



dered toward the window. He was fond of old gimcracks and bibelots, of every order and epoch, but he had, I knew, a special tenderness for the productions of the baser period of the French monarchy. His collection of snuff-boxes and flowered screens was highly remarkable—might, I suppose, have been called celebrated. In spite of his foreign name he was a genuine compatriot of my own, and indeed our acquaintance had begun with our being, as very small boys, at school together. There was a tradition that Sanguinetti's grandfather had been an Italian image-vendor, in the days when those gentlemen might have claimed in America to be the only representatives of a care for the fine arts. In the early part of the century they were also less numerous than they have since become, and it was believed that the founder of the transatlantic stock of the Sanguinettis had, by virtue of his fine Italian eyes, his slouched hat, his earrings, his persuasive eloquence, his foreign idioms and his little tray of plaster effigies and busts, been deemed a personage of sufficient importance to win the heart and hand of the daughter of a well-to-do attorney in the State of Vermont. This lady had brought her husband a property which he invested in some less brittle department of the Italian trade, and, prospering as people, alas! prospered in those good old days, bequeathed, much augmented, to the father of my guest. My companion, who had several sisters, was brought up like a little gentleman, and showed symptoms even at the earliest age of his mania for refuse furniture. At school he used to collect old slate-pencils and match-boxes; I suppose he inherited the taste from his grandfather, who had perambulated the country with a tray covered with the most useless ornaments (like a magnified chess-board) upon his head. When he was twenty years old Sanguinetti

lost his father and got his share of the patrimony, with which he immediately came to Europe, where he had lived these many years. When I first saw him, on coming to Paris, I asked him if he meant never to go back to New York, and I very well remember his answer. "My dear fellow" (in a very mournful tone), "what *can* you get there? The things are all second-rate, and during the Louis Quinze period, you know, our poor dear country was really—really——" And he shook his head very slowly and expressively.

I answered that there were (as I had been told) very good spinning-wheels and kitchen-settles, but he rejoined that he cared only for things that were truly elegant. He was a most simple-minded and amiable little bachelor, and would have done anything possible to oblige a friend, but he made no secret of his conviction that "pretty things" were the only objects in the world worth troubling one's self about. He was very near-sighted, and was always putting up his glass to look at something on your chimney-piece or your side-table. He had a lingering, solemn way of talking about the height of Madame de Pompadour's heels and the different shapes of old Dutch candlesticks; and though many of his country-people thought him tremendously "affected," he always seemed to me the least pretentious of men. He never read the newspapers for their politics, and didn't pretend to: he read them only for their lists of auction-sales. I had a great kindness for him; he seemed to me such a pure-minded mortal, sitting there in his innocent company of Dresden shepherdesses and beauties whose smiles were stippled on the lids of snuff-boxes. There is always something agreeable in a man who is a perfect example of a type, and Sanguinetti was all of one piece. He was the perfect authority on pretty things.

He kept looking at the window, as I have said, and it required no great shrewdness to guess that his thoughts had stepped out of it and were hovering in front of the hairdresser's *étalage*. I was inclined to humour his enthusiasm, for it amused me to see a man who had hitherto found a pink-faced lady on a china plate a sufficiently substantial object of invocation led captive by a charmer who would, as the phrase is, have something to say for herself.

"Shouldn't you have liked to have a closer view of her?" I asked, with a sympathetic smile.

He glanced at me and blushed again. "That lovely creature?"

"That lovely creature. Shouldn't you have liked to get nearer?"

"Indeed I should. That sheet of plate-glass is a great vexation."

"But why didn't you make a pretext for going into the shop? You might have bought a tooth-brush."

"I don't know that I should have gained much," said Sanguinetti, simply.

"You would have seen her move; her movement is charming."

"Her movement is—the poetry of motion. But I could see that outside."

"My dear fellow, you are not enterprising enough," I urged. "In your place I should get a footing in the shop."

He fixed his clear little near-sighted eyes upon me. "Yes, yes," he said, "it would certainly be delightful to be able to sit there and watch her: it would be more comfortable than standing outside."

"Rather, my dear boy. But sitting there and watching her? You go rather far."

"I suppose I should be a little in the way. But every now and then she would turn her face toward

me. And I don't know but that she is as pretty behind as before," he added.

"You make an observation that I made myself. She has so much *chic*."

Sanguinetti kissed his finger-tips with a movement that he had learned of his long Parisian sojourn. "The poetry of *chic*! But I shall go further," he presently pursued. "I don't despair, I don't despair." And he paused, with his hands in his pockets, tilting himself back in his seat.

"You don't despair of what?"

"Of making her my own."

I burst out laughing. "Your own, my dear fellow! You are more enterprising than I thought. But what do you mean? I don't suppose that, under the circumstances, you can marry her?"

"No; under the circumstances, unfortunately, I can't. But I can have her always there."

"Always where?"

"At home, in my salon. It's just the place for her."

"Ah, my good friend," I rejoined, laughing, but slightly scandalised, "that's a matter of opinion."

"It's a matter of taste. I think it would suit her."

A matter of taste, indeed, this question of common morality! Sanguinetti was more Parisianised than I had supposed, and I reflected that Paris was certainly a very dangerous place, since it had got the better of his inveterate propriety. But I was not too much shocked to be still a good deal amused.

"Of course I shall not go too fast," he went on. "I shall not be too abrupt."

"Pray don't."

"I shall approach the matter gradually. I shall go into the shop several times, to buy certain things. First a pot of cold cream, then a piece of soap, then

a bottle of glycerine. I shall go into a great many ecstasies and express no end of admiration. Meanwhile, she will slowly move around, and every now and then she will look at me. And so, little by little, I will come to the great point."

"Perhaps you will not be listened to."

"I will make a very handsome offer."

"What sort of an offer do you mean?"

"I am ashamed to tell you: you will call it throwing away money."

An offer of money! He was really very crude. Should I too come to this, if I continued to live in Paris? "Oh," I said, "if you think that money simply will do it——"

"Why, you don't suppose that I expect to have her for nothing?" He was actually cynical, and I remained silent. "But I shall not be happy again—at least for a long time"—he went on, "unless I succeed. I have always dreamed of just such a woman as that; and now at last, when I behold her perfect image and embodiment, why, I simply can't do without her." He was evidently very sincere.

"You are simply in love," I said.

He looked at me a moment, and blushed. "Yes, I honestly believe I am. It's very absurd."

"From some point of view or other, infatuations are always absurd," I said; and I decided that the matter was none of my business.

We talked of other things for an hour, but before he took leave of me Sanguinetti reverted to the beautiful being at the hairdresser's. "I am sure you will think me a great donkey," he said, "for taking that—that creature so seriously"; and he nodded in the direction of the other side of the street.

"I was always taught, in our country, that it is one's duty to take things seriously!"

I made a point, of course, the next day, of stopping at the hairdresser's window for the purpose of obtaining another glimpse of the remarkable woman who had made such an impression upon my friend. I found, in fact, that there was a large aperture in the back of the window through which it was very possible to see what was going on in a considerable part of the shop. Just then, however, the object of Sanguinetti's admiration was not within the range of vision of a passer-by, and I waited some time without her appearing. At last, having invented something to buy, I entered the aromatic precinct. To my vexation, the attendant who came forward to serve me was not the charming woman whom I had seen the evening before on the pavement, but the young person of inferior attractions who had come to the door to call her. This young person also wore a black silk dress and had a very neat figure ; she was beautifully *coiffée* and very polite. But she was a very different affair from Sanguinetti's friend, and I rather grudged the five francs that I paid her for the little bottle of lavender-water that I didn't want. What should I do with a bottle of lavender-water ? I would give it to Sanguinetti. I lingered in the shop under half-a-dozen pretexts, but still saw no sign of its lovelier inmate. The other young woman stood smiling and rubbing her hands, answering my questions and giving explanations with high-pitched urbanity. At last I took up my little bottle and laid my hand upon the door-knob. At that moment a velvet curtain was raised at the back of the shop, and the hairdresser's wife presented herself. She stood there a moment, with the curtain lifted, looking out and smiling ; on her beautiful head was poised a crisp little morning-cap. Yes, she was lovely, and I really understood Sanguinetti's sudden passion. But I could not remain staring at her, and, as I had exhausted my expedients,



I was obliged to withdraw. I took a position in front of the shop, however, and presently she approached the window. She looked into it to see if it was in proper order. She was still smiling—she seemed always to be smiling—but she gave no sign of seeing me, and I felt that if there had been a dozen men standing there she would have worn that same sweetly unconscious mask. She glanced about her a moment, and then, extending a small, fair, dainty hand, she gave a touch to the back hair of one of the waxen ladies—the right-hand one, the blonde.

A couple of hours later, rising from breakfast, I repaired to my little balcony, from which post of observation I instantly espied a figure stationed at the hairdresser's window. If I had not recognised it otherwise, the attentive, absorbed droop of its head would at once have proved it to be Sanguinetti. "Why does he not go inside?" I asked myself. "He can't look at her properly out there." At this conclusion he appeared himself to have arrived, for he suddenly straightened himself up and entered the establishment. He remained within a long time. I grew tired of waiting for him to reappear, and went back to my arm-chair to finish reading the *Débats*. I had just accomplished this somewhat arduous feat when I heard the lame tinkle of my door-bell, a few moments after which Sanguinetti was ushered in.

He really looked love-sick; he was pale and heavy-eyed. "My too-susceptible friend," I said, "you are very far gone."

"Yes," he answered; "I am really in love. It is too ridiculous. Please don't tell any one."

"I shall certainly tell no one," I declared. "But it does not seem to me exactly ridiculous."

He gave me a grateful stare. "Ah, if you don't find it so, *tant mieux*."

"Unadvisable, rather; that's what I should call it."



He gave me another stare. "You think I can't afford it?"

"It is not so much that."

"You think it won't look well? I will arrange it so that the harshest critic will be disarmed. This morning she is in great beauty," he added, the next moment.

"Yes, I have had a glimpse of her myself," I said. "And you have been in the shop?"

"I have spent half an hour there. I thought it best to go straight to the point."

"What did you say?"

"I said the simple truth—that I have an intense desire to possess her."

"And the hairdresser's wife—how did she take it?"

"She seemed a good deal amused."

"Amused, simply? Nothing more?"

"I think she was a little flattered."

"I hope so."

"Yes," my companion rejoined, "for, after all, her own exquisite taste is half the business." To this proposition I cordially assented, and Sanguinetti went on: "But, after all, too, the dear creature won't lose that in coming to me. I shall make arrangements to have her hair dressed regularly."

"I see that you mean to do things *en prince*. Who is it that dresses her hair?"

"The coiffeur himself."

"The husband?"

"Exactly. They say he is the best in Paris."

"The best husband?" I asked.

"My dear fellow, be serious—the best coiffeur."

"It will certainly be very obliging of him."

"Of course," said Sanguinetti, "I shall pay him for his visits, as—if—as if——" And he paused a moment.

"As if what?"

"As if she were one of his fine ladies. His wife tells me that he goes to all the duchesses."

"Of course that will be something," I replied. "But still——"

"You mean that I live so far away? I know that, but I will give him his cab-fare."

I looked at him, and—I couldn't help it—I began to laugh. I had never seen such a strange mixture of passion and reason.

"Ah," he exclaimed, blushing, "you *do* think it ridiculous!"

"Yes," I said, "coming to this point, I confess it makes me laugh."

"I don't care," Sanguinetti declared, with amiable doggedness; "I mean to keep her to myself."

Just at this time my attention was much taken up by the arrival in Paris of some relatives who had no great talent for assimilating their habits to foreign customs, and who carried me about in their train as cicerone and interpreter. For three or four weeks I was constantly in their company, and I saw much less of Sanguinetti than I had done before. He used to appear, however, at odd moments, in my rooms, being, as may be imagined, very often in the neighbourhood. I always asked him for the latest tidings of his audacious flame, which had begun to blaze in a manner that made him perfectly indifferent to the judgement of others. The poor fellow was sincerely in love.

"*Je suis tout à ma passion*," he would say when I asked him the news. "Until that matter is settled I can think of nothing else. I have always been so when I have wanted a thing intensely. It has become a monomania, a fixed idea; and naturally this case is not an exception." He was always going into the shop. "We talk it over," he said. "She can't make up her mind."

"I can imagine the difficulty," I answered.

"She says it's a great change."

"I can also imagine that."

"I never see the husband," said Sanguinetti. "He is always away with his duchesses. But she talks it over with him. At first he wouldn't listen to it."

"Naturally!"

"He said it would be an irreparable loss. But I am in hopes he will come round. He can get on very well with the other."

"The other?—the little dark one? She is not nearly so pretty."

"Of course not. But she isn't bad in her way. I really think," said Sanguinetti, "that he will come round. If he does not we will do without his consent, and take the consequences. He will not be sorry, after all, to have the money."

You may be sure that I felt plenty of surprise at the business-like tone in which Sanguinetti discussed this unscrupulous project of becoming the "possessor" of another man's wife. There was certainly no hypocrisy about it; he had quite passed beyond the stage at which it is deemed needful to throw a sop to propriety. But I said to myself that this was doubtless the Parisian tone, and that, since it had made its mark upon so perfect a little model of social orthodoxy as my estimable friend, nothing was more possible than that I too should become equally perverted. Whenever, after this, Sanguinetti came in he had something to say at first about the lovely creature across the way. "Have you noticed her this morning?" he would demand. "She is really enchanting. I thought of asking leave to kiss her."

"I wonder you should ask leave," I answered. "I should suppose you would do it without leave, and count upon being forgiven."

"I am afraid of hurting her," he said. "And then if I should be seen from the street, it would look rather absurd."

I could only say that he seemed to me a very odd mixture of perversity and discretion, but he went on without heeding my comments: "You may laugh at the idea, but, upon my word, to me she is different every day; she has never the same expression. Sometimes she's a little melancholy—sometimes she's in high spirits."

"I should say she was always smiling."

"Superficially, yes," said Sanguinetti. "That's all the vulgar see. But there's something beneath it—the most delicious little pensive look. At bottom she's sad. She's weary of her position there, it's so public.—Yesterday she was very pale," he would say at another time; "I'm sure she wants rest. That constant movement can't be good for her. It's true she moves very slowly."

"Yes," said I, "she seemed to me to move very slowly."

"And so beautifully! Still, with me," Sanguinetti went on, "she shall be perfectly quiet; I will see how that suits her."

"I should think she would need a little exercise," I objected.

He stared a moment, and then accused me, as he often did, of "making game" of him. "There is something in your tone in saying that," he remarked; but he shortly afterward forgot my sarcastic tendencies, and came to announce to me a change in the lady's coiffure. "Have you noticed that she has her hair dressed differently? I don't know that I like it; it covers up her forehead. But it's beautifully done, it's entirely new, and you will see that it will set the fashion for all Paris."

"Do they take the fashion from her?" I asked.

"Always. All the knowing people keep a note of her successive coiffures."

"And when you have carried her off, what will the knowing people do?"

"They will go by the other, the dark one—Mademoiselle Clémentine."

"Is that her name? And the name of your sweetheart?"

Sanguinetti looked at me an instant, with his usual helplessly mistrustful little blush, and then he answered, "Rose-Agathe."

When I asked him how his suit was prospering, he usually replied that he believed it to be merely a question of time. "We keep talking it over, and in that way, at any rate, I can see her. The poor woman can't get used to the idea."

"I should think not."

"She says it would change everything—that the shop would be a different place without her. She is so well known, so universally admired. I tell her that it will not be impossible to get a clever substitute; and she answers that, clever as the substitute may be, she will never have the peculiar charm of Rose-Agathe."

"Ah! she herself is aware then of this peculiar charm?"

"Perfectly, and it delights her to have me talk about it."

A part of the charm's peculiarity, I reflected, was that it was not spoiled by the absence of modesty; yet I also remembered the coiffeur's handsome wife had looked extremely *pudique*. Sanguinetti, however, appeared bent upon ministering to her vanity; I learned that he was making her presents. "I have given her a pair of earrings," he announced, "and she is wearing them now. Do notice them as you pass. They are great big amethysts, and are extremely becoming."

I looked out for our beautiful friend the next time I left the house, but she was not visible through the hairdresser's window. Her plainer companion was waiting upon a fine lady, presumably one of the duchesses, while Madame Anatole herself, I supposed, was posturing before one of the mirrors in the inner apartment, with Sanguinetti's big amethysts in her ears.

One day he told me that he had determined to buy her a *parure*, and he greatly wished I would come and help him to choose it. I called him an extravagant dog, but I good-naturedly consented to accompany him to the jeweller's. He led me to the Palais-Royal, and there, somewhat to my surprise, introduced me into one of those dazzling little shops which wear upon their front in neat gilt letters the candid announcement, "Imitation." Here you may purchase any number of glittering gems for the most inconsiderable sum, and indulge at a moderate expense a pardonable taste for splendour. And the splendour is most effective, the glitter of the counterfeit jewels most natural. It is only the sentiment of the thing, you say to yourself, that prevents you from making all your purchases of jewellery in one of these convenient establishments; though, indeed, as their proprietors very aptly remark, fifty thousand francs more (for instance) is a good deal to pay for sentiment. Of this expensive superstition, however, I should have expected Sanguinetti to be guilty.

"You are not going to get a real set?" I asked.

He seemed a little annoyed. "Wouldn't you in that case blow me up for my extravagance?"

"It is highly probable. And yet a present of false jewellery! The handsomer it is, you know, the more ridiculous it is."

"I have thought of that," said my friend, "and I confess I am rather ashamed of myself. I should

like to give her a real set. But, you see, I want diamonds and sapphires, and a real set such as I desire would cost about a hundred thousand francs. That's a good deal for—for——” And he paused a moment.

“For a barber's wife,” I said to myself.

“Besides,” my companion added, “she won't know the difference.” I thought he rather under-estimated her intelligence : a pretty Parisienne was, by instinct, a judge of *parures*. I remembered, however, that he had rarely spoken of this lady's intellectual qualities ; he had dwelt exclusively upon her beauty and sweetness. So I stood by him while he purchased for two hundred francs a gorgeous necklace, and a coronet of the stones of Golconda. His passion was an odd affair altogether, and an oddity the more or the less hardly mattered. He remarked, moreover, that he had at home a curious collection of artificial gems, and that these things would be an interesting addition to his stock. “I shall make her wear them all,” he exclaimed ; and I wondered how she would like it.

He told me afterwards that his offering had been most gratefully received, that she was now wearing the wonderful necklace, and that she looked lovelier than ever.

That evening, however, I stopped before the shop to catch a glimpse, if possible, of the barber's lady thus splendidly adorned. I had seldom been fortunate enough to espy her, and on this occasion I turned away disappointed. Just as I was doing so I perceived something which suggested that she was making a fool of my amiable friend. On the radiant bosom of one of the great waxen dolls in her window glittered a necklace of brilliants which bore a striking resemblance to the article I had helped Sanguinetti to select. She had made over her lover's tribute to this rosy effigy, to whom, it must be confessed, it was very becoming.



Yet, for all this, I was out in my calculation. A week later Sanguinetti came into my rooms with a radiant countenance, and announced to me the consummation of his dream. "She is mine! she is mine! mine only!" he cried, dropping into a chair.

"She has left the shop?" I demanded.

"Last night—at eleven o'clock. We went off in a cab."

"You have her at home?"

"For ever and ever!" he exclaimed, ecstatically.

"My dear fellow, my compliments!"

"It was not an easy matter," he went on. "But I held her in my arms."

I renewed my congratulations, and said I hoped she was happy; and he declared that she had an expression of pure bliss. There was something in her eyes. He added that I must immediately come and see her; he was impatient to present me. Nothing, I answered, would give me greater pleasure, but meanwhile what did the husband say?

"He grumbles a bit, but I gave him five hundred francs."

"You have got off easily," I said; and I promised that at my first moment of leisure I would call upon my friend's new companion. I saw him three or four times before this moment arrived, and he assured me that she had made a happy man of him. "Whenever I have greatly wanted a thing, waited for it, and at last got it, I have always been in bliss for a month afterwards," he said. "But I think that this time my pleasure will really last."

"It will last as long, I hope, as she herself does!"

"I am sure it will. This is the sort of thing—yes, smile away—in which I get my happiness."

"*Vous n'êtes pas difficile*," I rejoined.

"Of course she's perishable," he added in a moment.

"Ah!" said I, "you must take good care of her."

And a day or two later, on his coming for me, I went with him to his apartment. His rooms were charming, and lined from ceiling to floor with the "pretty things" of the occupant—tapestries and bronzes, terra-cotta medallions and precious specimens of porcelain. There were cabinets and tables charged with similar treasures; the place was a perfect little museum. Sanguinetti led me through two or three rooms, and then stopped near a window, close to which, half hidden by the curtain, stood a lady, with her head turned away from us, looking out. In spite of our approach she stood motionless until my friend went up to her and with a gallant, affectionate movement placed his arm round her waist. Hereupon she slowly turned and gazed at me with a beautiful brilliant face and large quiet eyes.

"It is a pity she creaks," said my companion as I was making my bow. And then, as I made it, I perceived with amazement—and amusement—the cause of her creaking. She existed only from the waist upward, and the skirt of her dress was a very neat pedestal covered with red velvet. Sanguinetti gave another loving twist, and she slowly revolved again, making a little gentle squeal. She exhibited the back of her head, with its beautifully braided tresses resting upon her sloping waxen shoulders. She was the right-hand elfin of the coiffeur's window—the blonde! Her movement, as Sanguinetti had claimed, was particularly commendable, and of all his pretty things she was certainly the prettiest.

POOR RICHARD



## I

MISS WHITTAKER'S garden covered a couple of acres, behind and beside her house, and at its further extremity was bounded by a large pasture, which in turn was bordered by the old disused towing-path beside the river, at this point a slow and shallow stream. Its low, flat banks were unadorned with rocks or trees, and a towing-path is not in itself a romantic promenade. Nevertheless, here sauntered bareheaded, on a certain spring evening, the mistress of the acres just mentioned and many more beside, in sentimental converse with an impassioned and beautiful youth.

She herself would have been positively plain, but for the frequent recurrence of a magnificent smile—which imparted a charm to her somewhat undistinguished features—and (in another degree) for the elegance of her dress, which expressed one of the later stages of mourning, and was of that voluminous abundance proper to women who are both robust and rich. The good looks of her companion, for very good they were, in spite of several defects, were set off by a shabby suit, as carelessly worn as it was inartistically made. His manner, as he walked and talked, was that of a nervous, headstrong man, wrought almost to desperation; while she had the air of a person a good deal bored but determined to be patient. A brief silence, however, had at last fallen

upon them. Miss Whittaker strolled along quietly, looking at the slow-mounting moon, and the young man gazed on the ground, swinging his stick. Finally, with a heavy blow, he brought it to earth.

"Oh, Gertrude!" he cried, "I despise myself."

"That's very horrid," said Gertrude.

"And, Gertrude, I adore you."

"That's more horrid still," said Gertrude, with her eyes still on the moon. And then, suddenly and somewhat impatiently transferring them to her companion's face—"Richard," she asked, "what do you mean when you say you adore me?"

"Mean? I mean that I love you."

"Then why don't you say what you mean?"

The young man looked at her a moment. "Will you give me leave to say *all* I mean?"

"Oh dear!" Then, as he remained silent, "I wait for your words," Gertrude added.

Yet he still said nothing, but went striking vehemently at the weeds by the water's edge, like a young fellow who sees that he is in the wrong whatever line he takes.

"Gertrude!" he suddenly exclaimed, "what more do you want than the assurance that I love you?"

"I want nothing more. I am quite satisfied with that. You yourself seemed to wish to pile it up."

"Either you won't understand me," cried Richard, "or"—daring a vicious glance at her—"you can't!"

Miss Whittaker stopped and looked thoughtfully into his face. "In our position, if it becomes you to sacrifice reflexion to feeling, it becomes me to do the reverse. Listen to me, Richard. I *do* understand you, and better, I believe, than you understand yourself."

"Oh, you think me a baby, I know!"

But she continued, heedless of his interruption. "I thought that, by leaving you to yourself awhile,

your feelings might become clearer to you. But they seem to be growing only more confused. I have been so fortunate, or so unfortunate, I hardly know which,"—and she smiled faintly,—“as to make you like me. That's all very well, but you must not make too much of it. Nothing could make me happier than to be liked by you, or by any one else. But here it must stop with you, as it stops with others.”

“It does not stop here with others.”

“I beg your pardon. You have no right to say that. It is partly out of justice to others that I speak to you as I am doing. I shall always be one of your best friends, but I shall never be more. It is best I should tell you this at once. I might trifle with you awhile and make you happy (since upon such a poor thing you seem to set your happiness) by allowing you to suppose that I care for you in another way; but the end would soon come, and then where should we be? You may, in your disappointment, call me heartless now—I freely give you leave to call me anything that will ease your mind—but what would you call me then? Friendship, Richard, is an excellent cure for love. Here is mine.” And she held out her hand.

“No, I thank you,” said Richard, gloomily folding his arms. “I know my own feelings,” and he raised his voice. “Haven't I lived with them night and day for weeks and weeks? Great heaven, Gertrude Whittaker, this is no fancy! I'm not one of that sort. My whole life has gone into my love. God has let me idle it away hitherto only that I might begin it with you. Dear Gertrude, hear me! I have some, at least, of the faculties of a man. I know I'm not respectable, but I honestly believe I should repay any one who would bear with me. It's true I have neither worked, nor persisted, nor studied, nor earned a cent. But, on the other hand, I have



never cared for any woman before. I have waited for you. And now—now, after all, I am to sit down to simple liking—to friendship! The devil! Be friends with men whom you don't make mad! You do me!"

An honest flush rose to Gertrude's cheek. "So much the worse for you!" she cried, with a bitter laugh. "So much the worse for both of us! But what is your contention? Do you wish to marry me?"

Richard flinched a moment under this tacit proposition suddenly ringing in the air, but not from want of heart. "You have named it," he said.

"Well, then, I only pity you the more for your consistency. I can only entreat you again to rest content with what I have offered you. It's not such a bad substitute, Richard, as I understand it. What my love might be I don't know—I couldn't answer for that; but of the kind of interest I take in you I am very sure. We both have our duties in this matter, and I have resolved to take a liberal view of mine. I might lose patience with you, you know, and turn away from you altogether—leave you alone with your dreams, and let you break your heart. But it's rather by seeing more of me than by seeing less that your feelings will change."

"You don't mean it! And yours?"

"I have no doubt they will change, too; not in kind, but in degree. The better I know you, I am sure, the better I shall like you. The better too you will like me. Don't turn your back upon me—I speak the truth. You will get to entertain a serious opinion of me—which I'm sure you haven't now, or you wouldn't talk of my making you mad. But you must be patient. It's a singular fact that it takes longer to learn to live on rational terms with a woman than to fancy one adores her. A sense of madness

is a very poor feeling to marry upon. You wish, of course, to leave off your idle life and your bad habits—you see I am so thoroughly your friend that I am not afraid of touching upon disagreeable facts, as I should be if I were your ‘adored.’ But you are so indolent, so irresolute, so undisciplined, so uneducated”—Gertrude spoke deliberately and watched the effect of her words—“that you find a change of life very difficult. I propose, with your consent, to appoint myself your caretaker. Henceforth my house will be open to you as to my dearest friend. Come as often and stay as long as you please. Not in a few weeks, perhaps, nor even in a few months, but in God’s good time, you will be a capable young man, in working order—which I don’t consider you now, and which I know you don’t consider yourself. But I have a great opinion of your talents” (this was very shrewd of Gertrude), “and even of your nature. If I turn out to have done you a service, you will not want to marry me then.”

Richard had silently listened, with a deepening frown. “That’s all very pretty,” he said; “but it’s humbug—humbug from beginning to end. What’s the meaning of all that rigmarole about the inconsistency of friendship and love? Such talk is enough to make one curse. Refuse me outright, and send me to the devil, if you must; but don’t bemuddle your own brains at the same time. Ah, one little word knocks it all to pieces: I want you for my *wife*! You make an awful mistake in treating me as a boy—a deadly mistake. I *am* in working order—I began to live properly when I began to love you. I have sworn off drinking as effectually as if I hadn’t touched a drop for twenty years. I hate it, I loathe it—I have drunk my last. No, Gertrude, I am no longer a boy—you have cured me of that. Hang it, that’s why I love you! Don’t you see?

Ah, Gertrude,"—and his voice fell—"you are a great enchantress! You have no arts, you have none of the airs and graces of the girls that are called pretty; but you are an enchantress without them. It's your nature. You are so divinely, damvably honest! Those clever things you just said were meant for a dash of cold water, but you can't drown me by holding me under a spout. You will say it's nothing but common-sense. Very likely; but that is the point. Your common-sense captivates me—it's for that that I love you."

There was something now so calmly resolute in his tone that Gertrude was sickened. She found herself weaker than he, while the happiness of both of them demanded that she should be stronger.

"Richard Maule," she said, "you are unkind!" There was a tremor in her voice as she spoke, and as she ceased speaking she burst into tears. A selfish sense of victory took possession of the young man. He threw his arm about her; but she shook it off. "You are a coward, sir!" she cried.

"Oh, softly!" said Richard, flushing angrily.

"You go too far; you persist beyond decency."

"You hate me now, I suppose," said Richard, brutally, like one at bay.

Gertrude brushed away her tears. "No, indeed," she answered, sending him a dry, clear glance. "To hate you I should have to have loved you. I pity you still."

Richard looked at her a moment. "I don't feel tempted to return the feeling, Gertrude," said he. "A woman with so much diplomacy as you needs no pity."

"I have not diplomacy enough to read your sarcasm, sir; but I have good-nature enough to excuse it, and I mean to keep my good-nature to the end. I mean to keep my temper, I mean to be just, I mean to be conclusive, and not to have to return

to this matter. It's not for my pleasure, I would have you know, that I go into all this ; I have nerves as well as you. Therefore listen to me once again. If I don't love you, Richard, in your way, I don't ; and if I can't, I can't. We can't love by will. But with friendship, when it is once established, I believe the will and the reason may have a great deal to do. I will, therefore, put the whole of my mind into my friendship for you, and in that way we shall perhaps be even. Such a feeling—as I shall naturally show it—will, after all, not be very different from that other feeling you ask—as I should naturally show it. Bravely to reconcile himself to such difference as there is is no more than a man of honour ought to do. Do you understand me ? ”

“ You have an admirable way of putting things. ‘ After all,’ and ‘ such difference as there is ’ ! The difference is the difference of marriage and no marriage. I suppose you don't mean that you are willing to live with me without that ceremony ? ”

“ You suppose correctly.”

“ Then why do you falsify matters ? A woman is either a man's wife, or she isn't.”

“ Yes ; and a woman is either a man's friend, or she isn't.”

“ And you are mine, and I am an ungrateful brute not to rest satisfied ! That's what you mean ! Heaven knows you are right ”—and he paused a moment, with his eyes on the ground. “ Don't despise me, Gertrude,” he went on—“ I am not so ungrateful as I seem. I am very much obliged to you for the pains you have taken. Of course I understand your not loving me. You would be a grand fool if you did ; and you are no fool, Gertrude.”

“ No, I am no fool, Richard. It's a great responsibility—it's dreadfully vulgar ; but, on the whole, I am rather glad.”

"So am I. I could hate you for it ; but there is no doubt it's why I love you. If you were a fool you might love me ; but I shouldn't love you, and if I must choose, I prefer that."

"Heaven has chosen for us. Ah, Richard," pursued Gertrude, with admirable simplicity, "let us be good and obey heaven, and we shall be sure to be happy." And she held out her hand once more.

Richard took it and raised it to his lips. She felt their pressure and withdrew it.

"Now you must leave me," she said. "Did you ride ? "

"My horse is at the village."

"You can go by the river, then. Good-night."

"Good-night."

The young man moved away in the gathering dusk, and Miss Whittaker stood for a moment looking after him.

## II

To appreciate the importance of this conversation the reader must know that Miss Gertrude Whittaker was a young woman of four-and-twenty, whose father, recently deceased, had left her alone in the world, with a large fortune, accumulated by various enterprises in that part of the State. He had appointed a distant and elderly kinswoman, by name Miss Pendexter, as his daughter's household companion ; and an old friend of his own, known to combine shrewdness with integrity, as her financial adviser. Motherless, country-bred, with rather thick features, Gertrude on reaching her majority had neither the tastes nor the manners of a fine lady. Of a vigorous, active constitution, with a warm heart, a cool head, and a very pretty talent for affairs, she was, in virtue both of her wealth and of her tact, one of the principal persons of the country-side. These facts had forced her into a prominence which she made no attempt to elude, and in which she now felt thoroughly at home. She knew herself to be a power in the land ; she knew that, present and absent, she was continually talked about as the rich Miss Whittaker ; and although as modest as a woman need be, she was neither so timid nor so nervous as to wish to shirk her implied obligations. Her feelings were indeed, throughout, strong, rather than delicate ; and yet there was in her whole nature, as the world had

learned to look at it, a kind of genial discretion which attracted universal respect. She was impulsive, yet circumspect; thrifty, yet open-handed; literal, yet addicted to joking; keenly observant of human distinctions, yet almost indiscriminately hospitable; with an immense fund of common-sense beneath all; and yet beyond this—like the priest behind the king—and despite her preponderantly prosaic and, as it were, secular tone, a certain latent suggestion of heroic possibilities which he who had once become sensible of them (supposing him to be young and enthusiastic) would linger about her hoping to elicit, as you might stand and inhale a florid and vigorous dahlia which, for an instant, in your passage, should have proved delightfully fragrant. It is upon the actual existence, in more minds than one, of a mystifying sense of this desultory aroma that our story is based.

Richard Maule and Gertrude Whittaker were old friends. They had, in the first place, gone democratically to the town-school together, as children; and then their divergent growth, as boy and girl, had been conscious of an elastic bond in a continued intimacy between Gertrude and Fanny Maule, Richard's sister, who, however, in the fullness of time had married and followed her husband to California. With her departure the old relations of habit between her brother and her friend had slackened and gradually ceased. Richard had grown up a rebellious and troublesome boy, with a disposition combining stolid apathy and hot-headed eagerness in equal, contradictory proportions. Losing both of his parents before he was well out of jackets, he had found himself at the age of sixteen in possession actual, and as he supposed uncontested, of the paternal acres. It was not long, however, before those turned up who were disposed to question his immediate ability to manage them; the result of which was,



that the property was leased for five years, and that Richard was taken bodily possession of by a maternal uncle, living on a farm of his own some three hundred miles away. Here our young man spent the remainder of his minority, ostensibly learning agriculture with his cousins, but actually learning nothing. He had very soon established, and had subsequently enjoyed without a day's interval, the reputation of an ill-natured fool. He was dull, disobliging, brooding, lowering. Reading and shooting he liked a little, because they were solitary pastimes ; but he was very slow in acquiring the arts which help a man to live happily with others. It was possible to get on with him only because he was at once too selfish and too simple for mischief. As soon as he came of age he entered upon the enjoyment of the old place on which his boyhood had been passed, and to which he appeared to cling the more perversely as it was known to be very thin land. He avoided his neighbours, his father's former associates ; he seemed to take pleasure in braving their disapproval of his queer proceedings ; he informed them that he wanted no help but what he paid for, and that he expected to work his farm for himself and by himself. In short, he proved himself to their satisfaction egregiously ungrateful and conceited. They were not slow to discover that his incapacity was as great as his vanity. In two years he had more than undone the work of the late lessee, who had tried some clever experiments on the thankless soil. At the end of three years people spoke of him as cracked ; it seemed to those who observed him that there was something so wanton in his errors as really to impugn his sanity. He appeared to have accepted this view of his condition, and to have given up all pretence of work. He went about silent and sullen, like a man who feels that he has a quarrel with fate. About this time it

became generally known that he was often the worse for liquor ; and he hereupon acquired the deplorable reputation of a man worse than unsociable—a man who boozes alone—although it was still doubtful whether this practice was the cause or the effect of his poor crops. About this time, too, he began again to see something of Gertrude Whittaker. For many months after his return he had been held at his distance, together with most of the local swains, by the knowledge of her father's extreme hostility to all suitors and fortune-hunters, and then, subsequently by the illness preceding the old man's death. When, however, at last, on the expiration of her term of mourning, Miss Whittaker opened to society her long-blockaded ports, Richard had, to all the world's amazement, been among the first to profit by this extension of the general privilege and to cast anchor in the wide and peaceful waters of her friendship. He found himself at this moment, considerably to his surprise, in his twenty-fourth year ; that is, a few months younger than the heiress.

It was impossible that she should not have gathered from mere juxtaposition an impression of the poor figure he cut in the world, and of his peculiar relation to his neighbours and his own affairs. Thanks to this impression, Richard found a very warm welcome—the welcome of easy compassion. Gertrude gave him all the back-news of his sister Fanny, with whom he had dropped correspondence, and, impelled by Fanny's complaints of his long silence, ventured upon a friendly recommendation that he should go straight home and write a letter to California. Richard sat before her, gazing at her out of his dark eyes, and not only attempting no defence of his conduct, but rejoicing dumbly in the utter absence of any possible defence—his exposure seemed so delightful. He wished he could be scolded like that every day or

two ; nothing had ever touched him so softly. He carried away an extraordinary sense of general alleviation ; and forthwith began a series of visits which, in the space of some ten weeks, culminated in the interview I have set before the reader. Painfully diffident in the company of most women, Richard had not from the first known what it was to be shy with Gertrude. As a man of the world finds it useful to refresh his social energies by an occasional *tête-à-tête* of an hour with himself, so Richard, with whom solitude was the rule, derived a certain austere satisfaction from an hour's contact with this young lady's quick wits and good-humour, her liberal way of life and active charity. Gradually, however, from a salutary process, this became a regular luxury. It was now pleasant to go to Gertrude because he enjoyed the contagion of her own success—because he witnessed her happiness without a sense of envy—because he forgot his entanglements and bad habits—because, finally, his soul slept away its troubles beneath her kind, clear eye, very much as his body had often slept away its weariness in the shade of a murmuring apple-tree. But the soul, like the body, will not sleep long without dreaming ; and it will not dream often without wishing at last to tell its dreams. Richard had one day ventured to impart his visions to Gertrude, and the revelation apparently had not been at all to her taste.

The fact that this blundering youth had somehow worked himself into an intimacy with Miss Whittaker very soon became public property among their neighbours ; and in the hands of these good people, naturally enough, received an important addition in the inference that—strange as it might seem—she was going to change her name for his. He was, of course, regarded as a very lucky fellow, and the prevalence of this impression was doubtless not without its effect

on the forbearance of certain long-suffering creditors. And even if she was not to marry him, it was further argued, she yet might lend him money ; for it was assumed without question that the necessity of raising money was the mainspring of Richard's suit. It must be declared without delay that this assumption was precipitate and unfair. Our hero had faults enough, but a mercenary habit was not one of them ; nor was an excessive concern on the subject of his debts one of his virtues. As for Gertrude, wherever else her perception of her friends' feelings may have been at fault, it was not at fault on this point. That he loved her as desperately as he tried to make her believe she indeed doubted ; but it never occurred to her to question his disinterestedness. And so, on the other hand, it was strictly because she was not in love with him that she resisted him, and not on account of the disparity of their fortunes. In accepting his very simple and natural overtures to friendship, in calling him " Richard " in remembrance of old days, and in submitting generally to the terms of their old acquaintance, she had foreseen no dangerous complications. She had regarded him as one more helpless human being to " look after." She had espoused his interests (like all good women, Gertrude was ever more or less of a partisan), because she loved his sister and because she pitied himself. She would stand to him *in loco sororis*. The reader has seen that she had given herself a long day's work.

It is not to be supposed that Richard's comparatively pacific retreat at the close of the walk by the river implied any instinct of resignation to the prospects which Gertrude had opened to him. It is explained rather by an intensity of purpose so deep as to believe it could take its time. This was not the end of his suit, but the beginning. He would not give in until he was positively beaten. It was all

very well, he reflected, that Gertrude should reject him. Such a woman as she ought properly to be striven for, and there was something ridiculous in the idea that she should be easily won, whether by himself or by another. Richard was a slow thinker, but he thought more wisely than he talked ; and he now took back all his angry boasts of accomplished self-mastery and humbly surveyed the facts of the case. He was on the way to recovery, but he was by no means cured, and yet his very humility assured him that he was curable. He was no hero, certainly, but he was better than his life ; he was no scholar, but, in his own view at least, he was not an ass. He was good enough to be better ; he was good enough not to sit by the hour soaking his limited understanding in whisky. And at the very least, if he was not worthy to possess Gertrude, he was yet worthy to strive to obtain her, and to live for evermore upon the glory of there having been such a question between himself and the great Miss Whittaker. He would raise himself then to that level from which he could address her as an equal, from which he would have a right to insist on something. How he would do this he was at a loss to determine. He was conscious of a great deal of crude intention, but he cursed the ignorance which was such an obstacle to his doing anything in particular. He longed vaguely for some continuous muscular effort, at the end of which he should find himself face to face with his mistress. But as, instead of being a Pagan hero, with an enticing task-list of impossibilities, he was a plain New England cultivator, with a bad conscience, and nature with him and not against him—as, after slaying his dragon, after renouncing liquor, his work was a simple operation in common-sense—in view of these facts he found but little inspiration in his prospect. Nevertheless he fronted it bravely. He was not to obtain

Gertrude by making a fortune, but by making himself a man, by learning to live. But as to learn to live is to learn to work, he would find some use for his valour. He would keep sober and clear-headed ; he would retrieve his land and pay his debts. Then let her refuse him if she could—or if she dared !

Meanwhile Gertrude, on her side, sat quietly at home, turning over in her own fashion a dozen little plans for her friend's redemption and for making the stream of his passion turn some other mill. Not but that she meant rigorously to fulfil her part of the engagement to which she had invited him in that painful scene by the river. Yet, with however much of the same firmness and mildness she might still meet him, she could not feel secure against repeated intrusion without the knowledge of a partial change, at least, in Richard's own attitude. Such a change could only be effected through some preparatory change in his life ; and a change in his life could be brought only about by the introduction of some new influence. This influence, unfortunately, was hard to find. However positively Gertrude had dwelt upon the practical virtue of her friendship, she was, on further reflexion, led to ask herself whether it mightn't be helped in its work. He was welcome enough to that, but he needed something more. It suddenly occurred to her, one morning, after Richard's image had been crossing and recrossing her mental vision for a couple of hours with wearisome pertinacity, that a world of good might accrue to him through the acquaintance of a person so clever, so superior as Captain Severn. There was no one who would not be better for knowing such a man. She would recommend Richard to his kindness, and him she would recommend to Richard's—what ? Here was the rub ! Where was there common ground between Richard and such a one as he ? To beg him to try to like



Richard was easy ; to ask Richard to care for *him* was absurd. If Richard could only know him the matter would take care of itself—he would take a fancy to him in spite of every prejudice. But to begin to praise any object to her young friend was just the way to make him hate it. He himself was such a subject for pity that it had never occurred to her to recommend any one to his benevolence. All the world seemed above him, and he was therefore out of sorts with all the world. If she could put her hand on some creature less favoured of nature and of fortune than himself, he might feel some sympathy for such a being. Captain Severn had, to her knowledge, not been a darling of destiny, but he was apparently quite contented with his lot, and thus he was raised several degrees above Richard, who would be certain to find a tacit rebuke in his resignation. Still, for all this, Gertrude would bring them together. She had a high opinion of the Captain's generosity, and if Richard should wantonly throw away such a chance the loss would be his own. It may be thought that in this enterprise Captain Severn was somewhat inconsiderately handled. But women have been known to show their affection for a man by sending him as a missionary to the cannibals. These words suggest the propriety of a short description of the person to whom they refer.



### III

EDMUND SEVERN was a man of eight-and-twenty, who, having for some time combated fortune and his own inclinations as a mathematical tutor in a country college, had, on the opening of the war, transferred his abilities to a more heroic field. The regiment of volunteers to which he belonged, and which was now a part of the army of the Potomac, had been raised in Miss Whittaker's district, and she had given almost every man in it—as a rich woman could do—some sign that her thoughts were with him. His soldiership, like his scholarship, was solid rather than brilliant. He was not destined to be heard of at home, nor to be lifted out of regimental work ; but on many an important occasion in Virginia he had proved himself in a modest way a very useful officer. Coming up, early in the war, with a severe wound, to be nursed by a married sister who was domiciled in Gertrude's neighbourhood, he was, like all his fellow-sufferers within a wide circuit, very soon honoured with a visit of anxious inquiry from Miss Whittaker, who was as yet known to him only by report, and who transmitted to him the warmest assurances of sympathy and interest, together with the liveliest offers of assistance ; and incidentally, as it were, to these, a copious collection of specimens from her hothouse and storeroom. Severn had taken the air for the first time in Gertrude's own cushioned

barouche, which she had sent to his door at an early stage of his convalescence, and which of course he had immediately made use of to pay his respects to his benefactress. He was taken aback by the humility with which, on this occasion, betwixt smiles and tears, she protested that to be of service to the suffering brave was a sacred privilege. The Captain liked her on the spot, and thought of nothing else as he drove home. Half-a-dozen visits, during the ensuing month, more than sufficed to convert him into what is called an admirer ; but as the weeks passed by he perceived there were great obstacles to his ripening into a real aspirant. Captain Severn was a serious man ; he was conscientious, discreet, deliberate, unused to act without a definite purpose. He liked to see where he was going, and never went far simply because the country was pretty ; he wanted to know where he should arrive. In pursuance of this tradition he had asked himself whether he was prepared to face the consequences of falling in love with our young lady. Since he had taken a vow, a twelvemonth before, not to marry until, by some means or another, he should have an income to point to, no great change had come to pass in his fortunes. He was still a poor man and an unsettled one ; he was still awaiting his real vocation. Moreover, while subject to the chances of war, he thought it wrong to draw a woman on ; he shrank in horror from the thought of converting some fresh girl into a figure of mourning. Miss Whittaker pleased him as he had never been pleased, but that seemed to him no reason for recanting his principles. He could no more afford to marry a rich woman than a poor one. When he should have earned enough money for two to live upon, then he would be free to marry whomsoever he might fancy—a beggar or an heiress. The truth is that the Captain was a great deal too proud. It was his fault

that he could not bring himself to forget the difference between his poverty and Gertrude's wealth. He would of course have resented the insinuation that the superior fortune of the woman he loved could seem to him a reason for not declaring his love ; but there is no doubt that in the case before us the sentiment in question didn't dare—or hadn't as yet dared—to lift its head. Severn had a deep aversion to being in debt. It is probable that, after all, he would have accepted obligations gracefully enough from a person with certain rights ; but while a woman was as yet neither his mistress nor his wife, the idea of being beholden to her was odious to him. It would have been a question with one who knew him whether at this juncture these logical ice-blocks were destined to resist the warmth of Gertrude's charms, or gradually to evaporate and flood the position. There would have been no question, however, but that he could keep up his consistency only at the cost of a considerable moral strain. At this moment, then, Severn had made up his mind that Gertrude was not for him, and that it behoved him to walk very straight. That Miss Whittaker, with a hundred rational cares, was anything less than supremely oblivious of him individually, it never occurred to him to suspect. The truth is that Gertrude's private and personal emotions were entertained in a chamber of her heart so remote from the portals of speech that no sound of their revelry found its way into the world. She thought of her modest, soldierly, scholarly friend as a gentleman who would perhaps some day take to wife some woman, who, however nice she might be, couldn't be as nice as he. But what was *she* to him ? A local roadside figure—at the very most a sort of millionaire Maud Müller—with whom it was pleasant for a lonely wayfarer to exchange a friendly good-morning. Her duty

was to fold her arms resignedly, to sit quietly on the sofa and watch a great happiness sink below the horizon. With this impression on Gertrude's part it is not surprising that Severn was not wrenched out of himself. The prodigy was apparently to be wrought—if wrought at all—by her taking her loss for granted. This left nothing between them but her casual hospitality, and the effect of that method, as yet, upon Severn had been none other than its effect upon all the world. It kept him in his best form. They talked and fraternised, and moreover they watched each other, but they breathed not a word of what each was thinking about most. It was with perfect honesty, therefore, that she had rebutted Richard's insinuation that the Captain enjoyed any especial favour. He was only another of her social pensioners.

The result of Gertrude's meditations was that she despatched a note to each of her two friends, requesting them to take tea with her on the following day. A couple of hours before tea-time she received a visit from one Major Luttrell, who was recruiting for a United States regiment at a large town, some ten miles away, and who had ridden over in the afternoon, in accordance with a general invitation conveyed to him through an old lady who had bespoken Miss Whittaker's consideration for him as a man of delightful manners and wonderful talents. Gertrude had replied to her venerable friend, with her wonted alacrity, that she would be very glad to see Major Luttrell should he ever come that way, and then had thought no more about him until his card was brought to her as she was dressing for the evening. He found so much to say to her that the interval passed very rapidly for both of them, before the simultaneous entrance of Miss Pendexter and of Gertrude's guests. The two officers were already slightly known to each

other, and Richard was introduced to each of them. They eyed the distracted-looking young farmer with some curiosity. Richard's was at all times a figure to attract attention ; but now he was really dramatic (so Severn thought at least) with his careless garments, his pale, handsome face, his dark mistrustful eyes, his nervous movements. Major Luttrell, who struck Gertrude as at once very agreeable and the least bit in the world insufferable, was, of course, invited to remain—which he straightway consented to do ; and it soon became evident to Miss Whittaker that her little plan would have no fruit. Richard practised a certain defiant, conscious silence, which, as she feared, gave him eventually a very pretentious air. His companions displayed that half-confessed effort to shine and to outshine natural to clever men who find themselves concurring to the entertainment of a young and agreeable woman. Richard sat by, wondering in sullen amazement whether he were an ignorant boor or they were only a pair of grimacing comedians. He decided, correctly enough, in substance, for the former hypothesis ; for it seemed to him that Gertrude's extreme accommodation (for as such he viewed it) of her tone and her manner to theirs was only another proof of her tremendous cleverness. How magnanimous an impulse on Richard's part was this submission for the sake of the woman he loved to a fact damning to his own vanity, could have been determined only by one who knew the proportions of that vanity. He writhed and chafed under the polish of tone and the variety of allusion by which the two officers consigned him to insignificance ; but he was soon lost in wonder at the richness of resource of their hostess. For a moment it seemed to him that she ought to spare him an exhibition by which he could only be mortified—for didn't she know his thoughts, she who was the cause of them all ? But the next

instant he asked himself, with a great revulsion of feeling, whether he was afraid to see the proof of how superior she was to himself. As he gulped down the sickening fact of his comparative, nay, his absolute ignorance of the great world represented by his rivals, he felt like anticipating its consequences by a desperate sally into the very field of their conversation. To some such movement Gertrude was continually inviting him by her glances, her smiles, her questions, by certain little calculated silences. But poor Richard knew that if he should attempt to talk he would choke ; and this assurance he imparted to his friend in a look piteously eloquent. He was conscious of a sensation under which his heart was fast turning into a fiery furnace, destined to consume all his good resolutions. He could not answer for the future now. Suddenly, as tea was drawing to a close, he became aware that Captain Severn had sunk into a silence very nearly as helpless as his own, and that he was covertly watching the progress of a lively dialogue between Miss Whittaker and Major Luttrell. He had the singular experience of seeing his own feelings reflected in the Captain's face ; that is, he discovered there an incipient jealousy. Severn too was in love !



#### IV

ON rising from table Gertrude proposed an adjournment to the garden, where she was very fond of entertaining her friends at this hour. The sun had sunk behind a long line of hills, far beyond the opposite bank of the river, a portion of which was discernible through a gap in the intervening wood. The high-piled roof and chimney-stacks, the picturesquely crowded surface, of the old patched and renovated farmhouse which constituted Miss Whitaker's residence, were ruddy with the declining rays. Our friends' long shadows were thrown over the smooth grass. Gertrude, having graciously gone to meet the gentlemen's desire for their cigars, suggested a stroll toward the river. Before she knew it she had accepted Major Luttrell's arm; and, as Miss Pendexter preferred remaining at home, Severn and Richard found themselves lounging side by side at a short distance behind their hostess. Gertrude, who had noticed the taciturnity which had suddenly fallen upon Captain Severn, and in her simplicity had referred it to some unwitting failure of attention on her own part, hoped to make up for her neglect by having him at her own side. She was in some degree consoled, however, by the sight of his conjunction with Richard. As for Richard, now that he was on his feet and in the open air, he found it easier to speak.



"Who is that fellow?" he asked, nodding toward the Major.

"Major Luttrell, of the —th Artillery."

"I don't like his face much," said Richard.

"Don't you?" rejoined Severn, amused at his companion's bluntness. "He's not handsome, but he looks like a soldier."

"He looks like a scoundrel, I think," said Richard.

Severn laughed outright, so that Gertrude glanced back at him. "Dear me! I think you put it rather strongly. He seems to me a very pleasant member of society."

Richard was sorely perplexed. He had expected to find acceptance for his bitterest animadversions, and lo! here was the Captain fighting for his enemy. Such a man as that was no rival. So poor a reviler could be but a poor adorer. Nevertheless, a certain new-born scepticism in regard to his old fashion of measuring human motives prevented him from adopting this conclusion as final. He would try another question.

"Do you know Miss Whittaker well?"

"Tolerably well. She was very kind to me when I was ill. Since then I have seen her a good many times."

"That's a way she has, being kind to people who are in trouble," Richard remarked, with a shrewdness which he thought superior. But as the Captain merely puffed his cigar responsively, he pursued, "What do you think of her appearance?"

"I like it very much," said the Captain.

"She isn't beautiful," said Richard, with calculation.

Severn was silent a moment, and then, just as Richard was about to dismiss him from his thoughts, as neither formidable nor satisfactory, he replied, with some emphasis, "You mean she isn't pretty."

She *is* beautiful, I think, in spite of the irregularity of her face. It's the sort of face you don't forget. She has no features, no colour, no lilies nor roses, no attitudes ; but she has *looks*, expressions."

Severn spoke Richard's mind as well as his own. That "She isn't beautiful" had been an extempore version of the young man's most cherished dogma, namely, She is beautiful. The reader will remember that he had so translated it on a former occasion. Now, all that he felt was a sense of gratitude to the Captain for having put it so much more finely than he, the above being his choicest public expression of it. But the Captain's eyes, somewhat brightened by his short but significant speech, were following Gertrude's slow steps. Richard saw that he could learn more from them than from any further oral declaration, for something in the lips beneath them seemed to indicate that *they* had judged themselves to have said enough, and they were obviously not the lips of a simpleton. As he thus deferred, with unwonted courtesy, to the Captain's silence, and transferred his gaze sympathetically to Gertrude's shapely shoulders and to her listening ear, he gave utterance to a tell-tale sigh—a sigh which there was no mistaking. Severn looked about ; it was now his turn to probe a little. "Good heavens," he exclaimed, "that boy is in love with her !"

After the first shock of surprise he accepted this fact with rational calmness. Why shouldn't he be in love with her ? "*Je le suis bien*," said the Captain ; "or, rather, I'm not." Could it be, Severn pursued, that *he* was a favourite ? He was an underbred young farmer, but it was plain that he had a soul of his own. He almost wished indeed that Richard might turn out to be in Gertrude's good graces. "But if he is," he reflected, "why should he sigh like the wind in the chimney ? It is true that there

is no arguing for lovers. I, who am out in the cold, take my comfort in whistling most impertinently. It may be that my friend here groans for very bliss. I confess, however, that he scarcely looks like a gratified swain."

And forthwith this faint-hearted gentleman felt a twinge of pity for Richard's probable ill-luck ; and as he compared it with the elaborately defensive condition of his own affections he felt a further pang of self-contempt. But it was easier to restore the equilibrium of his self-respect by an immediate cession of the field than by contesting it against this wofully wounded knight. "Whether he wins her or not, he'll fight for her," the Captain mused ; and, as he glanced at Major Luttrell, he felt there was some comfort in that. He didn't fancy the Major so very much.

They had now reached the water's edge, where Gertrude, having made her companion pause, turned round to await her other guests. As they came up Severn saw, or thought he saw (which is a very different thing), that her first look was at Richard. The "admirer" in his breast rose fratricidal for a moment against the quiet observer ; but the next it was pinioned again. "Amen," said the Captain ; "it's none of my business."

At this moment Richard was soaring very high. The end of his bad feelings had been a sudden exaltation. He looked at the scene before him with all sorts of remarkable ideas. Why should he stand tongue-tied, sulking at opportunity, when all nature beckoned him into the field ? There was the river-path where, a fortnight before, he had found an eloquence attested by Gertrude's tears. There was the admirable Gertrude herself, whose hand he had kissed and whose waist he had clasped. Surely, he was master here ! Before he knew it he had begun to express himself—rapidly, nervously, almost defiantly.

Major Luttrell having made an observation about the prettiness of the river, Richard entered upon a description of its general character and its superior beauty in that part of its course which traversed his own property, together with an enumeration of the fish which were to be found in it and a story about a great overflow ten years before. He spoke with sufficient volubility, but with a kind of angry shyness, his head thrown back and his eyes on the opposite bank. At last he stopped, feeling that he had given proof of his manhood, and looked towards Gertrude, whose eyes he had been afraid to meet until he had seen his adventure to a close. But she was looking at Captain Severn, under the impression that Richard had secured his auditor. Severn was looking at Luttrell, and Luttrell at Miss Whittaker; and all were apparently so deep in observation that they had marked neither his speech nor his silence. "Truly," thought the young man, "I'm well out of the circle!" But he was determined to be patient still, which was assuredly, all things considered, a very enlightened resolution. Yet there was always something spasmodic and unnatural in Richard's magnanimity. A touch in the wrong place would cause it to collapse. It was Gertrude's evil fortune to administer this puncture. As the party turned about toward the house Richard stepped to her side and offered her his arm, hoping in his heart—so implicitly did he count upon her sympathy, so almost boyishly, filially, did he depend upon it—for some covert token that his heroism, such as it was, had not been lost upon her.

But Gertrude, intensely preoccupied by the desire to repair her fancied injustice to the Captain, shook her head at him without even meeting his eye. "Thank you," she said; "I want Captain Severn"; who forthwith approached.

Poor Richard felt his feet touch the ground again, and at that instant he could have flung the Captain into the stream. Major Luttrell placed himself at Gertrude's other elbow, and Richard stood behind them, almost livid with spite, and half resolved to turn upon his heel and make his way home by the river. But it occurred to him that a more elaborate vengeance would be to follow the trio before him back to the lawn, and then show them how well he could dispense with their company. Accordingly, when they reached the house he stood aloof and bade Gertrude a grim good-night. He trembled with eagerness to see whether she would make an attempt to detain him. But Miss Whittaker, reading in his voice—it had grown too dark to see his face at the distance at which he stood—the story of some fancied affront, and unconsciously contrasting it, perhaps, with Severn's clear and unwarped accents, obeyed what she deemed a prompting of self-respect, and gave him, without her hand, a farewell as cold as his own. It is but fair to add that, a couple of hours later, as she reviewed the incidents of the evening, she repented very characteristically of this little act of justice.

## V

RICHARD hardly knew how he got through the following week. He found occupation, to a much greater extent than he suspected, in a sordid yet at the same time heroic struggle with himself. For several months now he had been leading, under Gertrude's inspiration, a very decent and sober life. So long as he was at comparative peace with Gertrude and with himself, such a life was more than easy ; it was delightful. It produced a moral buoyancy infinitely more delicate than the exhilaration of liquor. There was a kind of fascination in keeping the score of his abstinence. Having abjured excesses, he practised temperance after the fashion of a novice : nothing would suit him but not to drink at all. He was like an unclean man who, having washed himself clean, remains in the water to splash about. He wished to be religiously, superstitiously pure. This was easy, as I have said, so long as his goddess smiled, even though it were as a goddess indeed -- as a creature unattainable. But when she frowned and the heavens grew dark, Richard's sole dependence was his own good intention -- as flimsy a trust for an upward scramble, one would have predicted, as a tuft of grass on the face of a perpendicular cliff. Flimsy as it looked, however, it served him. It started and crumbled, but it held, if only by a single fibre. When Richard had cantered fifty yards away from Gertrude's gate in a fit of stupid rage, he suddenly

pulled up his horse and gulped down his passion, swearing an oath that, suffer what torments of feeling he might, he would not at least break the continuity of his reform. It was enough to be drunk in mind ; he would not be drunk in body. A singular, almost comical feeling of antagonism to Gertrude lent force to this resolution. " No, madam," he cried within himself, " I shall *not* fall back. Do your best ! I shall keep straight." We recover from great offences and afflictions by the aid of the same egotism they were perhaps meant to chasten. Richard went to bed that night fasting as grimly as a Trappist monk ; and his foremost impulse the next day was to stupefy himself with some drudgery. He found no task to his taste ; but he spent the day so actively, in mechanically getting rid of the time, that Gertrude's image found no chance to be importunate. He was engaged in the work of self-preservation, the most serious and absorbing work possible to man. Compared to this question of his own manhood it sometimes seemed not very important, after all, that Gertrude should listen to him. He tried later to build up a virtue by the most ruthless experiments and tests. He took long rides over the country, passing within a stone's throw of as many of the scattered wayside taverns as could be combined in a single circuit. As he drew near them he sometimes slackened his pace, as if he were about to dismount, pulled up his horse, gazed a moment, then, thrusting in his spurs, galloped away again like one pursued. At other times, in the late evening, when the window-panes were aglow with the ruddy light within, he would walk slowly by, looking at the stars, and, after maintaining this stoical pace for a couple of miles, would hurry home to his own dim and lonely dwelling. Having successfully performed this feat a certain number of times, he found his desire for Gertrude coming back to him,



but bereft in the interval of a jealousy which now seemed to him to have been fantastic. One morning, at any rate, he leaped upon his horse and cantered back to Miss Whittaker's.

He had made himself comparatively sure of his will ; but he was yet to acquire the mastery of his impulses. As he gave up his horse, according to his wont, to one of the men at the stable, he saw another animal, which he recognised as Captain Severn's. "Steady, my boy," he murmured to himself, as he would have done to a frightened steed. On the steps of the house he encountered the Captain, who had just taken his leave. Richard gave him a nod which was intended to be very friendly, and Severn nodded back, but didn't speak. Richard observed, however, that he was very pale, and that he was pulling a rosebud to pieces, as he walked ; whereupon our young man quickened his step. Finding the parlour empty, he instinctively crossed over to a small room adjoining it, which Gertrude had converted into a conservatory ; and as he did so, hardly knowing it, he lightened his heavy-shod tread. The glass door was open and Richard looked in. There stood Gertrude, with her back to him, bending apart with her hands a couple of tall flowering plants, and looking through the glazed partition behind them. Advancing a step, and glancing over the poor girl's shoulder, Richard had just time to see Severn mounting his horse at the stable-door, before Gertrude, startled by his approach, turned hastily round. Her face was flushed hot, her eyes brimming with tears.

"You !" she exclaimed, sharply.

Richard's head swam. That single word was so charged with an invidious distinction that it seemed the death-knell of all his hopes. He stepped inside the room and closed the door, keeping his hand on the knob.

"Gertrude," he said, "you love that man!"

"Well, sir?"

"Do you confess it?" cried Richard.

"Confess it? Richard Maule, how dare you use such language? I am in no humour for a scene. Let me pass."

Gertrude was angry; but as for Richard, it may almost be said that he was mad. "One scene a day is enough, I suppose," he cried. "What are these tears about? Wouldn't he have you? Did he refuse you, as you refused me? Unfortunate creature!"

Gertrude looked at him a moment with concentrated scorn. "You poor idiot!" she said, for all answer. She pushed his hand from the latch, flung open the door, and moved rapidly away.

Left alone, Richard sank down on a sofa and covered his face with his hands. It burned them, but he sat motionless, repeating to himself, mechanically, as if to avert thought, "You poor idiot! you poor idiot!" At last he got up and made his way out.

It seemed to Gertrude, for several hours after this incident, that she had a remarkably strong case against fortune. It is not necessary to repeat here the words she had exchanged with Captain Severn. They had come within an ace of a mutual understanding, and when a single movement of the hand of either would have jerked aside the curtain that hung between them, some malignant influence had paralysed them both. Had they too much pride?—too little imagination? We must content ourselves with supposing so. Severn had walked blindly across the yard, saying to himself, "She belongs to another," and adding, as he saw Richard, "and such another!" Gertrude had stood at her window, repeating, under her breath, "He belongs to himself, himself alone." And as if this were not enough,

when misconceived, slighted, wounded, she had turned back to her old, passionless, dutiful past, on the path of retreat to this asylum Richard Maule had arisen to forewarn her that she should find no peace even at home. There was something in the impertinence of his appearance at this moment which gave her a feeling that fate was against her, and there even entered into her mind a certain element of dread of the man whose passion was so insistent. She felt that it was out of place any longer to pity him. He was the slave of his passion, but his passion was strong. In her reaction against Severn's exaggerated respect, it gratified her, after a little, to remember that Richard had been brutal. He, at least, had ventured to insult her—he had loved her enough to forget himself. He had dared to make himself odious in her eyes, because he had cast away conventional forms. What cared he for the impression he made? He cared only for the impression he received. The violence of this reaction, however, was the measure of its duration. It was impossible that she should walk backward so fast without stumbling. Brought to her senses by this accident, she became aware that her judgement had deserted its post. She smiled to herself as she reflected that it had been taking holiday for a whole afternoon. "Richard was right," she said to herself. "I am no fool. I can't be a fool if I try. I am too thoroughly my father's daughter for that. I love that man, but I love myself better. Of course, then, I don't deserve to have him. If I loved him in a way to merit his love, I would sit down this moment and write him a note telling him that if he does not come back to me I shall die. But I shall neither write the note nor die. I shall live and grow stout, and look after my chickens and my flowers and my colts, and thank the Lord in my old age that I have never done anything immodest."

Well ! I am as He made me. Whether I shall ever deceive others, I know not ; but I certainly shall never deceive myself. I am quite as sharp as Gertrude Whittaker ; and this it is that has kept me from making a fool of myself and writing to poor Richard the note that I wouldn't write to Captain Severn. I needed to fancy myself wronged. I suffer so little—I needed a sensation. So, shrewd Yankee that I am, I thought I would get one cheaply by taking up that unhappy boy. Heaven preserve me from the heroics, especially the economical heroics ! The one heroic course possible I decline. What, then, have I to complain of ? Must I tear my hair because a man of taste has resisted my unspeakable charms ? To be charming you must be charmed yourself, or at least you must be able to be charmed ; and that apparently I am not. I didn't love him, or he would have known it. If you won't risk anything how can you demand of others that they shall ? ”

But at this point of her meditations Gertrude almost broke down. She felt that she was assigning herself but a dreary future. Never to be loved but by an intemperate, uneducated boy, who would never grow older, was a cheerless prospect, for it seemed to convert her into a kind of maiden-aunt. Yet her conscience smote her for her meditated falsity to Richard, her momentary readiness to succumb to the temptation to revert to him out of pique. She recoiled from this thought as from an act cruel and immoral. Was he any better suited to her now than he had been a month before ? Was she to apply for comfort where she would not apply for counsel ? Was she to drown her vexation at losing Captain Severn in a passion got up for the occasion ? Having done the young man so bitter a wrong in intention, nothing would appease her magnanimous remorse (as time went on) but to repair it in fact. She went so

far as to regret the harsh words she had cast upon him in the conservatory. He had been insolent and unmannerly, but he had an excuse. Much should be forgiven him, for he loved much. Even now that Gertrude had imposed upon her feelings a sterner regimen than ever, she could not defend herself from a sweet and sentimental thrill—a thrill in which, as we have intimated, there was something of a tremor—at the recollection of his strident accents and his angry eyes. It was far from her to desire a renewal, however brief, of this exhibition. She wished simply to efface from the young man's morbid mind the impression that she really scorned him, for she knew that against such an impression he was capable of taking the most reckless and ruinous comfort.

Before many mornings had passed, accordingly, she had a horse saddled, and, dispensing with attendance, took her way to his straggling farm. The house-door and half the windows stood open; but no answer came to her repeated summons. She rode round to the rear of the house, to the barn-yard, thinly tenanted by a few common fowl, and across the yard to a road which skirted its lower extremity and was accessible by an open gate. No human figure was in sight; nothing was visible in the hot stillness but the scattered and ripening crops, over which, in spite of her nervous solicitude, Miss Whittaker cast the glance of a connoisseur. A great uneasiness filled her mind as she measured the wide fields, apparently abandoned by their young master, and reflected that she perhaps was the cause of his absence. Ah, where was Richard? As she looked and listened in vain, her heart rose to her throat, and she felt herself on the point of calling wistfully upon his name. But her voice was stayed by the sound of a heavy rumble of cart-wheels, beyond a turn in the road. She touched up her horse and cantered

along until she reached the bend. A great four-wheeled cart, laden with masses of newly-broken stone and drawn by four oxen, was slowly advancing towards her. Beside it, patiently cracking his whip and shouting monotonously, walked a young man in a slouched hat and a red shirt, with his trousers thrust into his dusty boots. As he saw Gertrude he halted a moment, amazed, and then advanced, flicking the air with his whip. Gertrude's heart went out to him in a sigh of really tender relief. Her next reflexion was that he had never looked so well. The truth is that, in this rough adjustment, the native barbarian appeared to his advantage. His face and neck were browned by a week in the fields, his eye was clear, his step seemed to have learned a certain manly dignity from its attendance on the heavy bestial tramp. Gertrude, as he reached her side, pulled up her horse and held out her gloved fingers to his brown, dusty hand. He took them, looked for a moment into her face, and for the second time raised them to his lips.

"Excuse my glove," she said, with a little smile.

"Excuse mine," he answered, exhibiting his sun-burnt, work-stained hand.

"Richard," said Gertrude, "you never had less need of excuse in your life. You never looked half so well."

He fixed his eyes upon her a moment. "Why, you have forgiven me!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, I have forgiven you—both you and myself. We both of us behaved very absurdly, but we both of us had reason. I wish you had come back."

Richard looked about him, apparently at a loss for a rejoinder. "I have been very busy," he said, at last, with a simplicity of tone slightly studied. He was always wishing to produce an effect upon her, and it seemed to him just then that this was the way.



It was a certain instinct of calculation, too, that forbade Gertrude to express ail the joy which this assurance gave her. Excessive joy would have implied undue surprise ; and it was a part of her plan frankly to expect the best things of her companion. " If you have been busy I congratulate you. What have you been doing ? "

" Oh, a hundred things ! I have been quarrying, and draining, and clearing, and doing a lot of chores. I thought the best thing was just to put my own hands to it. I am going to make a stone fence along the great lot on the hill there. Wallace is for ever grumbling about his boundaries. I mean to fix them once for all. What are you laughing at ? "

" I am laughing at certain foolish apprehensions that I have been indulging for a week past. You are wiser than I, Richard. I have no imagination."

" Do you mean that *I* have ? I haven't enough to guess what you do mean."

" Why, do you suppose, have I come over this morning ? "

" Because you thought I was sulking on account of your having called me an idiot."

" Sulking, or worse. What do I deserve for the wrong I have done you ? "

" You have done me no wrong. You reasoned fairly enough. You are not obliged to know me better than I know myself. It's just like you to be ready to take back that bad word, and try to make yourself believe that it was unjust. But it was perfectly just, and therefore I have managed to bear it. I *was* an idiot at that moment—a nasty, impudent idiot. I don't know whether that man had been saying sweet things to you. But if he had you wouldn't have objected—your face told that ; I should have been less than a man, I should be unworthy of your—your affection, if I had failed to



see it. I did see it—I saw it as clearly as I see those oxen now ; and yet I bounced in with my own ill-timed claims. To do so was to be an awful ass. To have been other than an ass would have been to have waited, to have backed out, to have bitten my tongue off before I spoke, to have done anything but what I did. I have no right to claim you, Gertrude, until I can woo you better than that. It was the most fortunate thing in the world that you spoke as you did : it was even kind. It saved me all the misery of groping about for a starting-point. Not to have spoken as you did would have been to let me off far too easy ; and then, probably, I should have sulked, or, as you very considerably say, done worse. I had made a false move in the game, and the only thing to do was to repair it. But you were not obliged to know that I would so readily admit my move to have been false. Whenever I have made a fool of myself, before, I have been for sticking it out, and trying to turn all mankind—that is, *you*—into a fool too, so that I shouldn't be an exception. But this time, I think, I had a kind of inspiration. I felt that my case was desperate. I felt that if I adopted my folly now I adopted it for ever. The other day I met a man who had just come home from Europe, and who spent last summer in Switzerland. He was telling me about the mountain-climbing over there—how they get over the glaciers, and all that. He said that you sometimes came upon great slippery, snow-covered slopes that end short off in a precipice, and that if you stumble or lose your footing as you cross them diagonally, why, you go shooting down, and you're gone ; that is, but for one little dodge. You have a long walking-pole, with a sharp end, you know, and as you feel yourself sliding—it's as likely as not to be in a sitting posture—you just take this and ram it into the snow before you, and there you

are, stopped. The thing is, of course, to drive it in far enough, so that it won't yield or break ; and in any case it hurts infernally to come whizzing down upon this upright pole. But the interruption gives you time to pick yourself up. Well, so it was with me the other day. I stumbled and fell ; I slipped, and was whizzing downward ; but I just drove in my pole and pulled up short. It nearly tore me in two ; but it saved my life." Richard made this speech with one hand leaning on the neck of Gertrude's horse, and the other on his own side, and with his head slightly thrown back and his eyes on hers. She had sat quietly in her saddle, looking down at him. He had spoken slowly and deliberately, but without hesitation and without heat. " This is not romance, it's reality," thought Gertrude. And this feeling it was that dictated her reply, divesting it of sentiment so effectually as almost to make it sound trivial.

" It was fortunate you had an alpenstock," she said.

" I shall never travel without one again."

" Never, at least, with a companion who has the bad habit of pushing you off the path."

" Oh, you may push all you like," said Richard. " I give you leave. But isn't this enough about myself ? "

" That's as you think."

" Well, it's all I have to say for the present, except that I am tremendously glad to see you, and that of course you will stay awhile."

" But you have your work to do."

" Oh, I say, never you mind my work. I have earned my dinner this morning, if you have no objection ; and I propose to share it with you. So we will go back to the house." He turned her horse's head about, started up his oxen with his voice, and walked along beside her on the grassy roadside, with

one hand on the horse's mane and the other swinging his whip.

Before they reached the yard-gate Gertrude had thought over what he had just said to her. "Enough about himself," she said, silently echoing his words. "Yes, heaven be praised, it *is* about himself. I am but a means in this matter—he himself, his own character, his own happiness, is the end." Under this conviction it seemed to her that her part was appreciably simplified. Richard was learning wisdom and self-control, and to exercise his reason—such was the suit that he was destined to gain. Her duty was as far as possible to remain passive, and not to interfere with the working of the gods who had selected her as the instrument of their miracle. As they reached the gate Richard made a trumpet of his hands, and sent a ringing summons into the fields; whereupon a farm-boy approached, and, with an undisguised stare of amazement at Gertrude, took charge of his master's team. Gertrude rode up to the doorstep, where her host assisted her to dismount, and bade her go in and make herself at home, while he busied himself with the bestowal of her horse. She found that, in her absence, the old woman who administered her friend's household had reappeared, and had laid out the preparations for his midday meal. By the time he returned, with his face and head shining from a fresh ablution and his shirt sleeves decently concealed by a coat, Gertrude had apparently won the complete confidence of Mrs. Catching.

Gertrude doffed her hat, and tucked up her riding-skirt, and sat down, face to face with her entertainer, over his crumpled table-cloth. The young man played the host very tenderly and naturally; and Gertrude hardly knew whether to infer from his perfect self-possession that her star was already on the wane, or that it was higher in the heavens than

ever. The solution of her doubts was not far to seek ; Richard was absolutely at his ease in her presence. He had told her indeed that she intoxicated him ; and truly, in those moments when she was compelled to oppose her quiet surfaces to his crude unrest, her whole presence seemed to him to have a kind of wine-like strength. He had told her that she was an enchantress, and this assertion, too, had its measure of truth. But her spell was a steady one ; it sprang not from her beauty, her wit, her grace—it sprang from her character. In other words, Gertrude exercised the magnificent power of making her lover forget her face. Agreeably to this fact, his most frequent feeling when he was with her was a consciousness of the liberty to be still—a sensation not unlike that which in the early afternoon, as he lounged in his orchard with a pipe, he derived from the sight of the hot, vaporous hills. He was innocent of that delicious trouble which Gertrude's thoughts had touched upon as a not unnatural result of her visit, and which another woman's fancy would perhaps have demanded as an indispensable proof of its success. " Porphyro grew faint," the poet assures us, as he stood in Madeline's chamber on Saint Agnes's eve. But Richard did not in the least grow faint now that his mistress was actually filling his musty old room with her voice, her touch, her looks ; that she was sitting in his unfrequented chairs, trailing her skirt over his faded carpet, casting her perverted image upon his cheap mirror, and breaking his daily bread. He was not fluttered when he sat at her well-served table and trod her muffled floors—why then should he be fluttered now ? Miss Whittaker was herself in all places, and (once granted that she was not in trouble) to be at her side was to drink peace as fully in one place as in another.

Richard accordingly ate a great working-day dinner

in Gertrude's despite, and she ate a small one for his sake. She asked questions, moreover, and offered counsel, with very sisterly freedom. She deplored the rents in his table-cloth and the dismemberments of his furniture ; and although by no means absurdly fastidious in the matter of household elegance, she could not but think that Richard would be a happier and a better man if he were a little more comfortable. She forbore, however, to criticise the poverty of his domestic arrangements, for she felt that the obvious answer was that such a state of things was the penalty of his living alone ; and it was desirable, under the circumstances, that this idea should remain inarticulate.

When at last Gertrude began to bethink herself of going, Richard broke a long silence by the following question : " Gertrude, *do* you love that man ? "

" My dear sir," she said, " I refused to tell you before, because you asked the question as a right. Of course you do so no longer. No—I don't love him. I have been near it—but I have missed it. And now good-bye."

For a week after her visit Richard worked with renewed tenacity and felt like a hero. But one morning he woke up with all his courage gone, and limpness and languor in its place. He had been straining his faith in himself to an extreme tension, and the chord had suddenly snapped. In the hope that Gertrude's tender fingers might repair it he rode over to her, towards evening. On his way through the village he found people gathered in knots, reading fresh copies of the Boston newspapers over each other's shoulders, and learned that tidings had just come of a great battle in Virginia, which was also a great defeat. He procured a copy of the paper from a man who had done with it, and made haste to Gertrude's dwelling.

She received his story with all the passionate imprecations and regrets that were then in fashion. Before long Major Luttrell presented himself, and for half-an-hour there was no talk but about the battle. The talk, however, was chiefly between Gertrude and the Major, who found considerable ground for differing opinion, she being a rabid Republican, and he in cool opposition. Richard sat by, listening apparently, but with the detachment of one to whom the matter of the discourse was of much less interest than the manner of those engaged in it. At last, when tea was announced, Gertrude told her friends, very frankly, that she would not invite them to remain—that her heart was too heavy with her country's woes and with visions of carnage and suffering, to allow her to play the hostess—and that, in short, she was in the humour to be alone. Of course there was nothing for the gentlemen but to obey; but Richard went out cursing the law under which, in the hour of his mistress's sorrow, his company was a bore, not a cure. He watched in vain, as he bade her farewell, for some little sign that she would like him to stay but that as she wished to get rid of his companion civility demanded she should dismiss them both. No such sign was forthcoming, for the simple reason that Gertrude was sensible of no such undercurrent. The men mounted their horses in silence, and rode slowly along the lane which led from Miss Whittaker's stables to the highroad. As they approached the top of the lane they perceived in the twilight a mounted figure coming towards them. Richard's heart began to beat with an angry foreboding, which was confirmed as the rider drew near and disclosed the features of Captain Severn. Major Luttrell and he, being bound to exchange some greeting, pulled up their horses; and as an attempt to pass them in narrow quarters would have been a greater incivility than



even Richard was prepared to commit, he likewise halted.

"This is ugly news, isn't it?" said Severn. "It has determined me to go back to-morrow."

"Go back where?" asked Richard.

"To my regiment."

"Are you quite on your feet?" asked Major Luttrell. "How is that hole in your side?"

"It's so much better that I believe it can finish getting well down there as easily as here. Good-bye, Major; perhaps we shall meet again." And he shook hands with Major Luttrell. "Good-bye, Mr. Maule." And, somewhat to Richard's surprise, he stretched over and held out his hand to him.

Richard felt that it was tremulous, and, looking hard into his face, thought he saw there a kind of agitation, of choked emotion. Hereupon his fancy coursed back to Gertrude, sitting where he had left her, in the sentimental twilight, alone with her heavy heart. With a word, he reflected, a single little word, a look, a gesture, this happy man whose hand I hold can heal her distress. "Oh," he cried to himself, "that by this hand I might hold him fast for ever!"

It seemed to the Captain that Richard's grasp was needlessly protracted and severe. "What a fist the young horse-breaker has!" he thought. "Good-bye," he repeated aloud, disengaging himself.

"Good-bye," said Richard. And then he added, he hardly knew why, "Are you going to bid good-bye to Miss Whittaker?"

"Of course I am. Isn't she at home?"

Whether Richard really paused or not before he answered, he never knew. There suddenly arose such a tumult in his bosom that it seemed to him several moments before he became conscious of his reply. But it is probable that to Severn it came only too soon.

"No," said Richard; "she's not at home. She



is out for the evening. We have just been calling." As he spoke he shot a glance at his companion, armed with a challenge of his impending denial. But the Major just met his glance and then dropped his eyes. This slight motion was a horrible revelation—he had served the Major too!

"Dear me, I'm so sorry," said Severn, slacking his rein—"I'm so very sorry!" And from his saddle he looked down toward the house more longingly and regretfully than he knew.

Richard felt himself turning from pale to consuming crimson. There was a simple sincerity in Severn's words which was almost irresistible. For a moment he was on the point of shouting out a loud denial of his falsehood. "She is there, she's alone and in tears, awaiting you! Go to her—and be damned!" But before he could gather his words into his throat they were arrested by Major Luttrell's cool, clear voice, which, in its urbanity, seemed to mock at retractation.

"My dear Captain," said the Major, "I shall be very glad to take charge of any message."

"Thank you, Major. Pray do. Say how extremely sorry I was. It was my last chance. Good-bye again." And Captain Severn hastily turned his horse about, gave him his spurs and galloped away, leaving his friends standing alone in the middle of the road. As the sound of his retreat expired, Richard, in spite of himself, drew a long breath. He sat motionless in the saddle, hanging his head.

"Mr. Maule," the Major remarked at last, "that was very brilliantly done."

Richard looked up. "I never told a lie before—never!"

"Upon my soul, then, you did it uncommonly well. You did it so well I almost believed you. No wonder poor Severn did!"

Richard was silent ; then suddenly he broke out, " In God's name, sir, why don't you call me a black-guard ? I have done a beastly act ! "

" Oh come," said the Major, " you needn't mind that with me. We will take everything that's proper in the way of remorse for granted—consider that said. I feel bound to let you know that I am really much obliged to you. If you hadn't stopped him off, how do you know but that I might have done so ? "

" If you had, I would have given you the lie in your teeth."

" Would you, indeed ? It's very fortunate, then, that I held my tongue. If you will have it so, I won't deny that your little invention sounded very ugly. I'm devilish glad I didn't have anything to do with it, if you come to that."

Richard felt his wit sharpened by his red-hot scorn—a scorn far greater for his companion than for himself. " I am glad to hear that it did sound ugly. To me it seemed beautiful, holy, just. For the space of a moment it seemed absolutely right that I should say what I did. But you saw my fault in its horrid nakedness, and yet you let it pass. You have no excuse."

" I beg your pardon. You are immensely ingenious, but you are remarkably wrong. Are you going to make out that I am the guilty party ? Upon my word, you are a cool hand. I *have* an excuse. I have the excuse of being interested in Miss Whittaker's not having other people running after her."

" So I suppose. But you have no disinterested regard for her. Otherwise——"

Major Luttrell laid his hand on Richard's bridle. " Mr. Maule," said he, " I have no wish to talk metaphysics over this matter. You had better say no more. I know that your feelings are not of an en-

viable kind, and I am therefore prepared to be good-natured with you. But you must be civil yourself. You have done a nasty thing, you are ashamed of it, and you wish to shift the responsibility upon me, which is more shabby still. My advice is that you behave like a man of spirit and swallow your little scruples. I trust you are not going to make a fool of yourself by any apology or any fancied reparation. As for its having seemed holy and just to do what you did, that is mere gammon. A fib is a fib, and as such is often excusable. As anything else—as a thing beautiful, holy, or just—it's quite inexcusable. Yours was a fib to you, and a fib to me. It serves me, and I accept it. I suppose you understand me. I adopt it. You don't suppose it was because I was frightened by those big black eyes of yours that I held my tongue. As for my having a disinterested regard for Miss Whittaker, I have no report to make to you about it. I will simply say that I intend, if possible, to marry her."

"She'll not have you. She'll never marry a cold-blooded cheat."

"I think she'll prefer him to a hot-blooded one. Do you want to pick a quarrel with me? Do you want to make me lose my temper? I shall refuse you that satisfaction. You have been a coward, and you want to frighten some one before you go to bed to make up for it. Touch me and I'll kill you, but I propose not to notice your animadversions. Have you anything to say? No? Well, then, good evening." And Major Luttrell started away.

It was with white rage that Richard was dumb. Had he been but a cat's-paw after all? Heaven forbid! He sat irresolute for an instant, and then turned suddenly and cantered back to Gertrude's gate. Here he stopped again; but after a short pause he went in over the gravel, with a fast-beating heart,

wishing Luttrell had been there to see him. For a moment he fancied he heard the sound of the Major's returning steps. If he would only come and find him at confession—it would be so easy to confess before him! He went along beside the house to the front, and stopped beneath the open window of the drawing-room.

“ Gertrude ! ” he cried softly, from his saddle.

Gertrude immediately appeared. “ Mercy—*you* ! ” she exclaimed.

Her voice was neither harsh nor sweet ; but her words and her intonation recalled vividly to Richard's mind the scene in the conservatory, and they seemed to him keenly expressive of disappointment. He was invaded by a mischievous conviction that she had been expecting Captain Severn, or that at the least she had mistaken his voice for the Captain's. The truth is she had half imagined it might be—Richard's call having been little more than a loud whisper. The young man sat looking up at her, silent.

“ What do you want ? ” she asked. “ Can I do anything for you ? ”

Richard was not destined to do his duty that evening. A certain indefinable dryness of tone on Gertrude's part was the inevitable result of her finding that this whispered invocation came from poor Richard. She had been following her own thoughts. Captain Severn had told her a fortnight before that, in case of news of a defeat, he should not await the expiration of his leave of absence to return. Such news had now come, and it was clear to her that her friend would immediately take his departure. Naturally he would come and bid her farewell, and still more naturally she had her vision of what might pass between them at such a crisis. To tell the whole truth, it was under the pressure of these reflexions that, twenty minutes before, Gertrude

had dismissed our two gentlemen. That this long story should be told in the dozen words with which she greeted Richard will seem strange to the disinterested reader. But in those words poor Richard, with a lover's clairvoyance, read it at a single glance. The same rush of resentment, the same sinking of the heart that he had felt in the conservatory took possession of him once more. To be witness of Severn's passion for Gertrude—that he could endure. To be witness of Gertrude's passion for Severn—against that obligation his reason rebelled.

"What is it you wish, Richard?" Gertrude repeated. "Have you forgotten anything?"

"Nothing—nothing!" cried the young man. "It's no matter."

He gave a great pull at his bridle, and almost brought his horse back on his haunches, and then, wheeling him about on himself, he thrust in his spurs and galloped out of the gate.

On the highway he came upon Major Luttrell, who stood looking down the lane.

"I'm going to the devil, sir!" cried Richard. "Give me your hand on it."

Luttrell held out his hand. "My poor young man," said he, "you are quite out of your mind. I'm sorry for you. You haven't been making a fool of yourself?"

"I haven't made it better—I have made it worse!"

Luttrell didn't quite understand, but he breathed more freely. "You had better go home and go to bed," he said. "You will make yourself ill by all these gyrations."

"I—I'm afraid to go home," said Richard, in a broken voice. "For God's sake, come with me!"—and the wretched fellow burst into tears. "I am too bad for any company but yours," he cried, in his sobs.

The Major winced, but he took pity. "Come,

come," said he, "we shall wriggle through. I will go home with you."

They rode off together. That night Richard went to bed miserably drunk ; although Major Luttrell had left him at ten o'clock, adjuring him to drink no more. He awoke the next morning in a violent fever ; and before evening the doctor, whom one of his hired men had brought to his bedside, had come and looked grave and pronounced him very ill.

## VI

IN country districts, where life is quiet, small accidents loom large ; and accordingly Captain Severn's sudden departure for his regiment became very rapidly known among Gertrude's neighbours. She herself heard it from her coachman, who had heard it in the village, where the Captain had been seen to take the early train. She received the news calmly enough to outward appearance, but a great tumult rose and died in her breast. He had gone without a word of farewell ! Perhaps in the hurry of sudden preparation he had not had time to call upon her. Still, bare civility would have dictated his dropping her a line of writing—he who must have read in her eyes the feeling which her lips refused to utter, and who had been indebted to her for considerable attentions. It was not often that Gertrude threw back into her friends' teeth their acceptance of the hospitality which it had been placed in her power to offer them ; but if she now mutely reproached Captain Severn with ingratitude, it was because he had failed further than in appearing to forget what she had done for him—he had also lost all remembrance of the way she had done it. It is but natural to expect that our dearest friends will give us credit for our deepest feelings ; and Gertrude had constituted Edmund Severn her dearest friend. She had not, indeed, asked his assent to this arrangement, but she had made it



the occasion of all kinds of tacit vows ; she had given him the flower of her womanly charity, and, when his moment came, he had turned from her without a look. Gertrude shed no tears. It seemed to her that she had given her friend tears enough, and that to expend her soul in weeping would be to waste something that was now too precious. She would think no more of Edmund Severn. He should be as little to her for the future as she was to him.

It was very easy to make this resolution : to keep it Gertrude found another matter. She could not think of the war, she could not talk with her neighbours of current events, she could not take up a newspaper, without reverting to her absent friend. She was haunted with the idea that he had not allowed himself time really to recover, and that a fortnight's exposure would send him back to the hospital. At last it occurred to her that common decency required that she should make a call upon Mrs. Martin, the Captain's sister ; and a vague impression that this lady might be the depository of some farewell message—perhaps of a letter—which she was awaiting her convenience to present, led her at once to undertake this social duty. The carriage which had been ordered for her projected visit was at the door when, within a week after Severn's departure, Major Luttrell was announced. Gertrude received him in her bonnet. His first care was to present Captain Severn's message of good-bye, together with his regrets that he had not had a spare moment to come and see her. As Luttrell performed this office he watched his hostess narrowly, and was considerably reassured by the unflinching composure with which she listened to it. The turn he had given to Severn's farewell had been the fruit of much mischievous cogitation. It had seemed to him that, for his purposes, to represent the absent officer as alluding

hastily and mechanically to Miss Whittaker would be better than to represent him as not alluding at all, for that would have left a boundless void for the exercise of Gertrude's fancy. And he had reasoned well ; for although he was tempted to infer from her calmness that his shot had fallen short of the mark, yet in spite of her silent and almost smiling assent to his words it had made but one bound to her heart. Before many minutes she felt that Captain Severn's excuse had done her a world of good. " He had not a spare moment ! " Indeed, as she took to herself its full expression of indifference, she felt that her hard, forced smile was deepening into a sign of lively gratitude to the Major.

Major Luttrell had still another task to perform. He had spent half an hour on the preceding day at Richard's bedside, having ridden over to the farm, in ignorance of his illness, to see how matters stood with him. The reader will already have surmised that the Major was not a person of fastidious delicacy : he will therefore be the less surprised and shocked to hear that the sight of the poor young man — prostrate, fevered, delirious, and to all appearance rapidly growing worse — filled him with an emotion by no means akin to despair. In plain terms, he was very glad to find Richard a prisoner in bed. He had been racking his brains for a scheme to keep his young friend out of the way, and now, to his exceeding satisfaction, the doctors relieved him of this troublesome care. If Richard was booked for typhoid fever, which his symptoms seemed to indicate, he would not, even assuming that he should get well, be able to leave his room for many weeks. In a month much might be done ; with energy everything might be done. The reader has been all but directly informed that the Major's present purpose was to possess himself of Miss Whittaker's confidence, hand,

and fortune. He had no money and he had many needs, and he was so well advanced in life—being thirty-six years of age—that he had no heart to think of building up by slow degrees a career which had not yet taken the luxurious shape he desired. A man of refined tastes, too, he had become sensible, as he approached middle age, of the many advantages of a well-appointed home. He had therefore decided that a wealthy marriage would spread the carpet of repose. A girl of rather a fainter outline than Gertrude would have been the woman—we cannot say of his heart ; but, as he argued, beggars can't be choosers. Gertrude was a young lady with standards of her own ; but, on the whole, he was not afraid of her—he was abundantly prepared to do his duty. He had, of course, as became a man of observation, duly weighed his drawbacks against his advantages ; and after all his arithmetic there was a balance in his favour. The only serious difficulty in his path was the possibility that, on hearing of Richard's illness, Gertrude, with her confounded benevolence, would take a fancy to nurse him in person, and that in the course of her ministrations his delirious ramblings would force upon her mind the damning story of the deception practised upon Captain Severn. There was nothing for it but boldly to face this risk. As for that other fact, which many men of a feebler spirit would have deemed an invincible obstacle, Luttrell's masterly understanding had immediately converted it into the prime agent of success—the fact, namely, that Gertrude's affections were already engaged. Such knowledge as he possessed of the relations between Miss Whittaker and his comrade in the Volunteers he had gained by simply watching and taking little notes. These had been numerous, and on the whole his knowledge was accurate. It was at least what he might have termed a good working knowledge.

He had calculated on a passionate reactionary impulse on Gertrude's part, consequent on Severn's apparent delinquency. He knew that in a generous woman such an impulse, if left to itself, would not go very far ; but on this point it was that his policy bore. He would not leave it to itself : he would take it gently into his hands, spin it out, play upon it, and mould it into a clue which should lead him to the point he wanted to reach. He thus counted much upon his skill and his tact ; but he likewise placed a becoming degree of reliance upon his fine personal qualities—qualities a little too stiff and solid perhaps to be called charms, but thoroughly adapted to inspire confidence. The Major was not a handsome fellow ; he left that to people who hadn't the beauty of cleverness : but his ugliness was of a masculine, aristocratic, intelligent stamp. His figure, moreover, was good enough to compensate for the absence of a straight nose and a fine mouth ; and he looked like a man of action who was at the same time a man of culture and of society.

In her sudden anxiety on Richard's behalf Gertrude soon forgot her selfish heart-ache. The carriage which was to have conveyed her to Mrs. Martin's was used for a more disinterested purpose. The Major, prompted by a strong faith in the salutary force of his own presence, having obtained her permission to accompany her, they set out for the farm and soon found themselves in Richard's darkened room. The young man was immersed in a sleep from which it was judged imprudent to arouse him. Gertrude, sighing as she compared his bare bedroom with her own upholstered quarters, drew up a mental list of objects indispensable which she would immediately send him. Not that he had not received, however, a sufficiency of homely care. The doctor was assiduous, and old Mrs. Catching full of rough good sense.

"He asks very often after you, Miss," she said, addressing Gertrude, but with a sly glance at the Major. "But I think you had better not come too often. I am afraid you would work him up more than you would quiet him."

"I am afraid you would, Miss Whittaker," remarked the Major, who could have hugged Mrs. Catching.

"Why should I work him up?" asked Gertrude. "I am used to sick-rooms. I nursed my father for a year and a half."

"Oh, it's very well for an old woman like me, but it's no place for a fine young lady with a tail to her gown," said the goodwife, looking at Gertrude's muslins and laces.

"I am not so fine as to desert a friend in distress," said Gertrude. "I shall come again, and if it makes the poor fellow worse to see me, I shall stay away. I am ready to do anything that will help him to get well."

It had already occurred to her that in his unnatural state Richard might find her presence a source of irritation, and she was prepared to remain in the background. As she returned to her carriage she caught herself reflecting with so much pleasure upon Major Luttrell's kindness in expending a couple of hours of his valuable time on so unprofitable an object that, by way of expressing her satisfaction, she invited him to come home and dine with her.

After a short interval she paid Richard a second visit, in company with Miss Pendexter. He was a great deal worse; he lay there emaciated, exhausted, stupid; the issue seemed very doubtful. Gertrude immediately pushed on to the county town, which was larger than her own, sought out a professional nurse, and arranged with her to relieve Mrs. Catching, who was worn out with sitting up. For a fortnight,

moreover, she received constant tidings from the young man's physician. During this fortnight Major Luttrell carried on his siege.

It may be said, to his credit, that he had by no means conducted his suit upon that narrow programme which he had drawn up at the outset. He very soon discovered that Gertrude's rancour—if rancour there was—was a substance impalpable to any tactile process that he was master of, and he had accordingly set to work to woo her like an honest man, from day to day, from hour to hour, trusting so devoutly for success to momentary inspiration that he felt his suit dignified by a certain flattering *faux air* of genuine passion. He occasionally reminded himself, however, that he might really be more indebted to the favour of accidental contrast than Gertrude's life-long reserve—for it was certain she would not depart from it—would ever allow him to measure.

It was as an honest man, then—a man of impulse and of action—that Gertrude had begun to like him. She was not slow to perceive what he was “after,” as they said in that part of the world; and she was almost tempted at times to tell him frankly that she would spare him the intermediate steps and meet him at the goal without further delay. She knew very well that she should never fall in love with him, but it was conceivable she might live with him happily. An immense weariness had somehow come upon her, and a sickening sense of loneliness. A vague suspicion that her money had done her an incurable wrong inspired her with a profound disgust for the care of it. She felt cruelly hedged out from human sympathy by her bristling possessions. “If I had had five hundred dollars a year,” she said, in a frequent parenthesis, “I might have pleased him.” Hating her wealth, accordingly, and chilled by her isolation, the temptation was strong upon her to give herself



up to this wise, brave gentleman who seemed to have adopted such a happy medium betwixt loving her for her fortune and fearing her for it. Would she not always stand between men who would represent the two extremes? She should make herself decently secure by an alliance with Major Luttrell.

One evening, on presenting himself, Luttrell read these thoughts so clearly in her eyes that he made up his mind to speak. But his mind was burdened with a couple of facts of which it was necessary that he should disembarass it before it could enjoy the freedom of action the occasion required. In the first place, then, he had been over to see Richard Maule, and had found him suddenly and unexpectedly better. It was unbecoming, however—it was impossible—that he should allow Gertrude to dwell long on this pleasant announcement.

“ I tell the good news first,” he said, gravely. “ I have some very bad news, too, Miss Whittaker.”

Gertrude sent him a rapid glance. “ Some one has been killed ? ”

“ Captain Severn has been shot,” said the Major —“ shot by a beastly guerilla.”

Gertrude was silent—no answer seemed possible to that immitigable fact. She sat with her head on her hand and her elbow on the table beside her, looking at the figures in the carpet. She uttered no words of commonplace regret, but she felt as little capable of giving way to serious grief. She had lost nothing, and, to the best of her knowledge, *he* had lost nothing. She had an old loss to mourn—a loss a month old, which she had mourned as she might. To surrender herself to passion now would have been but to impugn the sincerity of what had already taken place in her mind. When she looked up at her companion she was outwardly calm, though I must add that a single glance of her eye directed him not to



## POOR RICHARD

presume upon it. She was aware that this glance betrayed her secret ; but in view both of Severn's death and of the Major's position such revelations were of little moment. Luttrell had prepared to act upon her hint, and to avert himself gently from the topic, when Gertrude, who had dropped her eyes again, raised them with a slight shudder. " I am very cold," she murmured. " Will you shut that window beside you, Major ? Or stay, suppose you give me my shawl from the sofa."

Luttrell brought the shawl, placed it on her shoulders, and sat down beside her. " These are cruel times," he said, with studied simplicity. " It is always the best that are taken."

" Yes, they are cruel times," Gertrude answered. " They make one feel cruel. They make one doubt of all one has learnt from one's pastors and masters."

" Yes, but they teach us something new also."

" I am sure I don't know," said Gertrude, whose heart was so full of bitterness that she felt almost malignant. " They teach us how mean we are. War is an infamy, Major, though it is your trade. It's very well for you, who look at it professionally, and for those who go and fight ; but it's a miserable business for those who stay at home and do the thinking and the—the *missing* ! It's a miserable business for women ; it makes us more spiteful than ever."

" Well, a little spite isn't a bad thing, in practice," said the Major. " War is certainly an abomination, both at home and in the field. But as wars go, Miss Whittaker, our own is a very satisfactory one. It involves important issues. It won't leave us as it found us. We are in the midst of a revolution, and what is a revolution but a turning upside down ? It makes sad work with our habits and theories—our traditions and convictions. But, on the other

hand," Luttrell pursued, warming to his task, "it leaves something untouched which is better than these—I mean our capacity to *feel*, Miss Whittaker." And the Major paused until he had caught Gertrude's eyes, when, having engaged them with his own, he proceeded. "I think that is the stronger for the downfall of so much else, and, upon my soul, I think it's in that we ought to take refuge. Don't you think so?"

"To feel what?" Gertrude inquired.

"Affection, admiration, hope!" said the Major. "I don't advocate fiddling while Rome is burning, you know. In fact, it's only poor unsatisfied devils that are tempted to fiddle. There is one sentiment which is respectable and honourable, and even sacred, at all times and in all places, whatever they may be. It doesn't depend upon circumstances, but they upon it; and with its help, I think, we are a match for any circumstances. I don't mean religion, Miss Whittaker," added the Major, with a significant smile.

"If you don't mean religion," said Gertrude, "I suppose you mean love. That's a very different thing."

"Yes, a very different thing; so I have always thought, and so I am glad to hear you say. Some people, you know, mix them up in the most extraordinary fashion. I don't regard myself as an especially religious man; in fact I believe I am rather remiss in that way. It's my nature. Half mankind are born so, or I suppose the affairs of this world wouldn't move. But I believe I am a good lover, Miss Whittaker."

"I hope for your own sake you are, Major Luttrell."

"Thank you. Do you think now you could entertain the idea for the sake of any one else?"

Gertrude neither dropped her eyes, nor shrugged

her shoulders, nor blushed, nor whimpered. If anything, indeed, she turned somewhat paler than before, as she sustained her companion's gaze and prepared to answer him as directly as she might.

"If I loved you, Major Luttrell, I should value the idea for my own sake."

The Major, too, blanched a little. "I put my question conditionally," he answered, "and I have got, as I deserved, a conditional reply. I will speak plainly, then, Miss Whittaker. *Do* you value the fact for your own sake? It would be plainer still to say, *Do* you love me? but I confess I am not brave enough for that. I will say, *Can* you? or I will even content myself with putting it in the conditional again, and asking you if you could; although, after all, I hardly know what the *if* understood can reasonably refer to. I am not such a fool as to ask of any woman—least of all of you—to love me contingently. You can only answer for the present, and say yes or no. I shouldn't trouble you to say either if I didn't conceive that I had given you time to make up your mind. It doesn't take for ever to know Robert Luttrell. I am not one of the great unfathomable ones. We have seen each other more or less intimately for a good many weeks; and as I am conscious, Miss Whittaker, of having shown you my best, I take for granted that if you don't fancy me now you won't a month hence, when you shall have seen my faults. Yes, Miss Whittaker, I can solemnly say," continued the Major, with genuine feeling, "I have shown you my best, as every man is in honour bound to do who approaches a woman with those predispositions with which I have approached you. I have striven hard to please you"—and he paused. "I can only say, I hope I have succeeded."

"I should be very insensible if all your kindness and your politeness had been lost upon me," Gertrude said.

"In heaven's name don't talk about politeness!" cried the Major.

"I am deeply conscious of your devotion, and I am very much obliged to you for urging your claims so respectfully and considerately. I speak seriously, Major Luttrell," pursued Gertrude. "There is a happy medium of expression, and you have taken it. Now it seems to me that there is a happy medium of affection, with which you might be content. I don't love you—no, not at all. I question my heart, and it gives me that answer. The feeling that I have is not a feeling to work prodigies."

"May it at least work the prodigy of allowing you to be my wife?"

Gertrude was silent a moment. "If you can respect a woman who gives you her hand in cold blood, you are welcome to mine."

Luttrell moved his chair and took her hand. "Beggars can't be choosers," said he, raising it to his moustache.

"Oh, Major Luttrell, don't say that," she answered. "I give you a great deal; but I keep a little—a little," said Gertrude, hesitating, "which I suppose I shall give to God."

"Well, I shall not be jealous," said Luttrell.

"The rest I give to you, and in return I ask a great deal."

"I shall give you all."

"No, I don't want more than I give," said Gertrude.

"But, pray," asked Luttrell, with an insinuating smile, "what am I to do with the difference?"

"You had better keep it for yourself. What I want is your protection, sir, your advice, your support. I want you to take me away from this place, even if you have to take me down to the army. I want to see the world under the shelter of your name."

## POOR RICHARD

I shall give you a great deal of trouble. I am a mere mass of possessions : what I am is nothing to what I have. But ever since I began to grow up, what I am has been the slave of what I have. I am weary of my chains, and you must help me to carry them." And Gertrude rose to her feet, as if to inform the Major that his audience was at an end.

He still held her right hand ; she gave him the other. He stood looking down at her, an image of manly humility, while from his silent breast went up a thanksgiving to favouring fortune.

At the pressure of his hands Gertrude felt her bosom heave. She burst into tears. " Oh, you must be very kind to me ! " she cried, as he put his arm about her, and she dropped her head upon his shoulder.

## VII

WHEN once Richard's health had taken a turn for the better, it began very rapidly to improve. "Until he is quite well," Gertrude said one day to her accepted suitor, "I should like him to hear nothing about our engagement. He was once in love with me himself," she added, very frankly. "Did you ever suspect it? But I hope he will have got better of that sad malady, too. Nevertheless, I shall expect nothing reasonable from him until he is quite strong; and as he may hear of my new intentions from other people, I propose that, for the present, we confide them to no one."

"But if he asks me point-blank," said the Major, "what shall I answer?"

"It's not likely he will ask you. How should he suspect anything?"

"Oh," said Luttrell, "that gentleman is one of your suspicious kind."

"Tell him we are not engaged then. A woman in my position may say what she pleases."

It was agreed, however, that certain preparations for the marriage should meanwhile go forward in secret, and that the ceremony itself should take place in August, as Luttrell expected to be ordered back into service in the autumn. At about this moment Gertrude was surprised to receive a short note from Richard, so feebly scrawled in pencil as to be barely

legible. "Dear Gertrude," it ran, "don't come to see me just yet. I'm not fit to be seen. You would hurt me, and I should shock you. God bless you! R. MAULE." Miss Whittaker explained his request to herself by the supposition that a report had come to him of Major Luttrell's late assiduities (which it was impossible should go unobserved); that, leaping at the worst, he had taken her engagement for granted; and that, under this impression, he could not trust himself to see her. She despatched him an answer, telling him that she would await his pleasure, and that, if the doctor would consent to his having letters, she would meanwhile occasionally write to him. "She will give me good advice," thought Richard impatiently; and on this point, accordingly, she received no account of his wishes. Expecting to leave her house and close it on her marriage, she spent many hours in wandering sadly over the meadow-paths and through the woodlands which she had known from her childhood. She had thrown aside the last ensigns of filial regret, and now walked, sad and splendid, in bright colours which those who knew her well must have regarded as a kind of self-defiance. It would have seemed to a stranger that, for a woman who had freely chosen a companion for life, she was curiously spiritless and sombre. As she looked at her pale cheeks and dull eyes in the mirror she felt ashamed that she had no fairer countenance to offer to her destined lord. She had lost her single beauty, her smile, and she would make but a ghastly figure at the altar. "I ought to wear a calico dress and an apron," she said to herself, "and not this glaring finery." But she continued to wear her finery, and to lay out her money, and to perform all her old duties to the letter. After the lapse of what she deemed a sufficient interval she went to see Mrs. Martin, and to listen dumbly to her



narration of her brother's death and to her simple eulogies.

Major Luttrell performed his part quite as bravely, and much more successfully. He observed neither too many things nor too few ; he neither presumed upon his success nor hung back from the next steps. Having, on his side, received no prohibition from Richard, he made his way back to the farm, trusting that with the return of reason his young friend might be disposed to renew that anomalous alliance in which, on the hapless evening of Captain Severn's farewell, he had taken refuge against his despair. In the long, languid hours of his early convalescence Richard had found time to survey his position, to summon back piece by piece the immediate past, and to frame a general scheme for the future. But more vividly than anything else there had finally disengaged itself from his meditations a kind of horror of Robert Luttrell.

It was in this humour that the Major found him ; and as he looked at the young man's gaunt shoulders, supported by pillows, at his face, so livid and aquiline, at his great dark eyes, which seemed to shine with the idea of their possessor's taking a fresh start, it struck him that an invincible spirit had been sent from a better world to breathe confusion upon his hopes. If Richard hated the Major, the reader may guess whether the Major loved Richard. Luttrell was amazed at his first remark.

" I suppose you have got her by this time," Richard said, calmly enough.

" Not quite," answered the Major. " There's a chance for you yet."

To this Richard made no rejoinder. Then, suddenly, " Have you had any news of Captain Severn ? " he asked.

For a moment the Major was perplexed at his

question. He had supposed that the news of Severn's death would have come to Richard's ears, and he had been half curious, half apprehensive as to its effect. But an instant's reflexion now assured him that the young man's estrangement from his neighbours had kept him hitherto, and might still keep him, in ignorance of the truth. Hastily, therefore, and inconsiderately, the Major determined to make this ignorance last a little longer ; it was always so much gained. " No," said he, " I have had no news. Severn and I are not on writing terms."

The next time Luttrell came to the farm he found the master sitting up in a cushioned, chintz-covered arm-chair, which Gertrude had sent him the day before out of her own dressing-room.

" Have you got her yet ? " asked Richard.

The note of provocation in his tone was so strong that the Major ceased to temporise. " Yes, I have ' got ' her, as you elegantly express it. We are engaged to be married."

The young man's face betrayed no emotion.

" Are you reconciled to it ? " asked Luttrell.

" Yes—so far as doing anything goes."

" What in the name of all that's conceited could you do ? Explain yourself."

" A man in my state can't explain himself. I mean that, however much I hate you, I shall accept Gertrude's marriage."

" It will be very kind of you. And you will be a wise man," the Major added.

" I am growing wise. I feel like Solomon on his throne, in this chair. But I confess, sir, I don't see how she could have you."

" Well, there's no accounting for tastes," said the Major, good-humouredly.

" Yes, but I thought hers was better."

They came to no more express understanding than

this with regard to the future. Richard continued to grow stronger, and to put off, in the same measure, the renewal of his intercourse with Gertrude. A month before he would have resented as an insult the intimation that he should ever be so resigned to lose her as he found himself now. He would not see her for two reasons : first, because he felt that it would be—or that at least, in reason, it ought to be—a painful experience to look upon his old mistress with a coldly critical eye ; and secondly, because, justify to himself as he would his new-born indifference, he could not entirely cast away the suspicion that it was a last remnant of disease, and that, when he stood on his legs again under the sky and among those natural things with which he had long since established a sort of sensuous communion, he would feel, as with a tumultuous rush, the return of his impetuous manhood and of his old capacity. When he had smoked a pipe in the outer sunshine, when he had settled himself once more to the long elastic bound of his mare, then he would see Gertrude. The reason of the change which had come upon him was that she had disappointed him—she who had used to seem to him above his measure altogether. She had accepted Major Luttrell, a man whom he despised ; she had so mutilated her magnificent nature as to match it with his. The validity of his dislike to the Major, Richard did not trouble himself to examine. He accepted it as an unerring instinct ; and, indeed, he might have asked himself, had he not sufficient proof ? Moreover he laboured under the sense of a gratuitous wrong. He had suffered a great torment of remorse to drive him into brutishness, and thence to the very gates of death, for an offence which he had deemed mortal, and which was, after all, but a phantasm of his excited conscience. What a fool he had been—a fool for his passionate fears, and a fool

for his penitence ! Marriage with Major Luttrell—such was the end of Gertrude's imagined anguish. Such, too, we hardly need add, was the end of that idea of reparation which had been so formidable to Luttrell. Richard had been generous ; he would now be just.

Far from impeding his recovery, these reflexions hastened it. One morning in the beginning of August Gertrude received notice that he was in her house. It was a still, sultry day, and Miss Whittaker, her habitual pallor deepened by the oppressive heat, was sitting alone, in a white morning-dress, languidly fanning aside at once the droning flies and her equally importunate thoughts. She found the young man standing in the middle of the drawing-room, booted and spurred.

" Well, Richard," she exclaimed, with some feeling. " at last you are willing to see me ! "

As his eyes fell upon her he started and stood almost paralysed, heeding neither her words nor her extended hand. It was not Gertrude he saw, but her ghost.

" In heaven's name, what has happened to you ? " he cried. " Have *you* been sick too ? "

Gertrude tried to smile, in feigned surprise at his surprise ; but her muscles relaxed. Richard's words and looks reflected more vividly than any mirror the blighted state of her person, the extreme misery of her soul. She felt herself growing faint. She moved backward to a sofa, and sank down.

Then Richard felt as if the room were revolving about him and his throat were choked with imprecations—as if his old extravagant passion had again taken possession of him, like a mingled legion of devils and angels. It was through the most unexpected pity that his love returned. He went forward and dropped on his knees at Gertrude's feet.

"Speak to me!" he cried, seizing her hands. "Are you unhappy? Is your heart broken? Oh, Gertrude! what have you come to?"

Gertrude drew her hands from his grasp and rose to her feet. "Get up, Richard," she said. "Don't talk so wildly. I am not well. I am very glad to see you. *You look well.*"

"I have got my strength again—and meanwhile you have been failing. You are unhappy, you are wretched! Don't say you are not, Gertrude: it's as plain as day. You are breaking your heart."

"The same old Richard!" said Gertrude, trying to smile again.

"Would that you were the same old Gertrude! Don't try to smile; you can't!"

"I *shall*!" said Gertrude, desperately. "I am going to be married, you know."

"Yes, I know. I don't congratulate you."

"I have not counted upon that honour, Richard. I shall have to do without it."

"You will have to do without a great many things!" cried Richard, horrified by what seemed to him her blind self-immolation.

"I have all I ask," said Gertrude.

"You haven't all *I* ask, then! You haven't all your friends ask."

"My friends are very kind, but I marry to suit myself."

"You have not suited yourself!" retorted the young man. "You have suited—God knows what!—your pride, your despair, your desolation!" As he looked at her the secret history of her weakness seemed to become plain to him, and he felt a desire to throttle the man who had taken a base advantage of it. "Gertrude!" he cried, "I entreat you to go back. It's not for my sake—I'll give you up—I'll go a thousand miles away, and never look at you again."

It's for your own. In the name of your happiness, break with that man! Don't fling yourself away. Buy him off, if you consider yourself bound. Give him your money. That's all he wants."

As Gertrude listened the blood came back to her face and two flames into her eyes. She looked at Richard from head to foot. "You are not weak," she said, "you are in your senses, you are well and strong; you shall tell me what you mean. You insult the best friend I have. Explain yourself! you insinuate odious things—speak them out!" Her eyes glanced toward the door, and Richard's followed them. Major Luttrell stood on the threshold.

"Come in, sir!" cried Richard. "Gertrude swears she will believe no harm of you. Come and tell her that she's wrong! How can you keep on persecuting a woman whom you have brought to this state: Think of what she was three months ago, and look at her now!"

Luttrell received this broadside without flinching; he had overheard Richard's voice from the hall, and he had steeled his heart for the encounter. He assumed the air of having been so amazed by the young man's first words as only to have heard his last; and he glanced at Gertrude mechanically, as if to comply with them. "What's the matter?" he asked, going over to her and taking her hand; "are you ill?" Gertrude let him have her hand, but she forbore to meet his eyes.

"Ill! of course she's ill!" cried Richard, passionately. "She's dying—she's consuming herself! I know I seem to be playing an odious part here, Gertrude, but, upon my soul, I can't help it. I look like a betrayer, an informer, a sneak, but I don't feel like one! Still, I will leave you, if you say so."

"Shall he go, Gertrude?" asked Luttrell, without looking at Richard.

"No. Let him stay and explain himself. He has accused you—let him prove his case."

"I know what he is going to say," said Luttrell. "It will place me in a bad light. Do you still wish to hear it?"

Gertrude drew her hand hastily out of Luttrell's. "Speak, Richard!" she cried, with a passionate gesture.

"Ah, you won't enjoy it," said Richard. "Gertrude, I have done you a vile wrong. How great a wrong I never knew until I saw you to-day so miserably altered. When I heard that you were to be married I fancied that it didn't matter much, and that my remorse had been wasted. But I understand it now, and *he* understands it too. You once told me that you had ceased to love Captain Severn. It wasn't true—you never ceased to love him—you love him at this moment. If he were to get another wound in the next battle, how would you feel—how would you bear that?" And Richard paused for an instant, with the force of his interrogation.

"For God's sake," said Gertrude, "respect the dead!"

"The dead! Is he dead?"

Gertrude covered her face with her hands.

"You beast!" cried Luttrell.

Richard turned upon him savagely. "You're a precious one to talk!" he roared. "You told me he was alive and well!"

Gertrude made a movement of speechless distress.

"You would have it, my dear," said Luttrell, in a superior tone.

Richard had turned pale, he began to tremble. "Excuse me, Gertrude," he said hoarsely, "I have been deceived. Poor, unhappy woman! Gertrude," he continued, going nearer to her and speaking in a whisper, "*I* killed him."



## POOR RICHARD

Gertrude fell back from him, as he approached her, with a look of unutterable horror. "I and *he*," Richard went on, pointing at Luttrell.

Gertrude's eyes followed the direction of his gesture, and transferred their scorching disgust to her suitor. This was too much for Luttrell's courage. "You eternal tormentor," she moaned at Richard, "speak out!"

"He loved you, though you believed he didn't," said Richard. "I saw it the first time I looked at him. To every one but you it was as plain as day. Major Luttrell saw it too. But he was too modest, and he never believed you cared for him. The night before he went back to the army he came to bid you good-bye. If he had seen you it would have been better for every one. You remember that evening, of course. We met him, Luttrell and I. He was all on fire—he meant to speak. I knew it; you knew it, Luttrell: it was in his fingers' ends. I intercepted him. I turned him off—I lied to him and told him you were absent from home. I was a coward, and I did neither more nor less than that. I knew you were waiting for him. It was stronger than my will—I believe I should do it again. Fate was against him, and he went off. I came back to tell you, but my damnable jealousy strangled me. I went home and drank myself into a fever. I have done you a wrong that I can never repair. I would go hang myself if I thought it would help you." Richard spoke slowly, softly, explicitly, as if irresistible Justice in person had her hand upon his neck and were forcing him down upon his knees. In the presence of Gertrude's dismay nothing seemed possible but perfect self-conviction. In Luttrell's attitude, as he stood with his head erect, his arms folded, and his cold grey eye fixed upon the distance, it struck him that there was something atrociously insolent; not

insolent to him—for that he cared little enough—but insolent to Gertrude and to the dreadful solemnity of the hour. Richard sent the Major a look of the most aggressive contempt. “As for Major Luttrell,” he said, “*he* was but a passive spectator. No, Gertrude, by heaven!” he burst out; “he was worse than I! I loved you, and he didn’t!”

“Our friend is correct in his facts, Gertrude,” said Luttrell, quietly. “He is incorrect in his inferences. I *was* a passive spectator of his deception. He appeared to enjoy a certain authority with regard to your wishes—the source of which I respected both of you sufficiently never to question—and I accepted the act which he has described as an exercise of it. You will remember that you had sent us away on the ground that you were in no humour for company. To represent you, therefore, to another visitor as absent seemed to me rather officious, but still pardonable. You will consider that I was wholly ignorant of your relations to that visitor; that whatever you may have done for others, Gertrude, to me you never vouchsafed a word of information on the subject, and that Mr. Maule’s words are a revelation to me. But I am bound to believe nothing that he says. I am bound to believe that I have injured you only when I hear it from your own lips.”

Richard made a movement as if to break out upon the Major; but Gertrude, who had been standing motionless, with her eyes upon the ground, quickly raised them, and gave him a look of imperious prohibition. She had listened, and she had chosen. She turned to Luttrell. “Major Luttrell,” she said, “you *have* been accessory to something that has been for me a very serious pain. It is my duty to tell you so. I mean, of course, a perfectly unwilling accessory. I pity you more than I can tell you. I think your position more pitiable than mine. It is true that I

never made a confidant of you. I never made one of Richard. I had a secret, and he surprised it. You were less fortunate." It might have seemed to a dispassionate observer that in these last four words there was an infinitesimal touch of tragic irony. Gertrude paused a moment while Luttrell eyed her intently, and Richard, from a somewhat tardy instinct of delicacy, walked over to the bow-window. "This is the most distressing moment of my life," she resumed. "I hardly know where my duty lies. The only thing that is plain to me is that I must ask you to release me from my engagement. I ask it most humbly, Major Luttrell," Gertrude continued, with warmth in her words and a chilling coldness in her voice—a coldness which it sickened her to feel there, but which she was unable to dispel. "I can't expect that you should give me up easily; I know that it's a great deal to ask, and"—she forced the chosen words out of her mouth—"I should thank you more than I can say if you would put some condition upon my release. You have done honourably by me, and I repay you with ingratitude. But I can't marry you." Her voice began to melt. "I have been false from the beginning. I have no heart to give you. I should make you a despicable wife."

The Major, too, had listened and chosen, and in this trying conjuncture he set the seal to his character as an accomplished man. He saw that Gertrude's movement was final, and he determined not to protest against the inscrutable. He read in the glance of her eye and the tone of her voice that the perfect dignity had fallen from his character—that his integrity had lost its bloom; but he also read her firm resolve never to admit this fact to her own mind nor to declare it to the world, and he was gratified by her forbearance. His hopes, his ambitions, his visions, lay before him like a heap of broken glass; but he

would be as graceful as she was. She had divined him, but she had spared him. The Major was inspired.

"You have at least spoken to the point," he said. "You leave no room for doubt or for hope. With the little light I have I can't say I understand your feelings, but I yield to them religiously. I believe so thoroughly that you suffer from the thought of what you ask of me that I will not increase your suffering by assuring you of my own. I care for nothing but your happiness. You have lost it, and I give you mine to replace it. And although it's a simple thing to say," he added, "I must remark that I thank you for your implicit faith in my integrity." And he held out his hand. As she gave him hers Gertrude felt horribly in the wrong; and she looked into his eyes with an expression so humble, so appealing, so grateful, that, after all, his exit may be called triumphant.

When he had gone Richard turned from the window with a tremendous sense of relief. He had heard Gertrude's speech, and he knew that perfect justice had not been done; but still there was enough to be thankful for. Yet now that his duty was accomplished, he was conscious of a sudden lassitude. Mechanically he looked at Gertrude, and almost mechanically he came towards her. She, on her side, looking at him as he walked slowly down the long room, his face indistinct against the deadened light of the white-draped windows behind him, marked the expression of his figure with another pang. "He has rescued me," she said to herself; "but his passion has perished in the tumult. Richard," she said aloud, uttering the first words of vague kindness that came into her mind, "I forgive you."

Richard stopped. The idea had lost its charm. "You are very kind," he said, wearily. "You are far too kind. How do you know you forgive me? Wait and see."

## POOR RICHARD

Gertrude looked at him as she had never looked before ; but he saw nothing of it. He saw a sad, plain girl, in a white dress, nervously handling her fan. He was thinking of himself. If he had been thinking of her he would have read in her lingering, upward gaze that he had won her ; and if, so reading, he had opened his arms Gertrude would have come to them. We trust the reader is not shocked at this piece of information. She neither hated him nor despised him, as she ought doubtless in consistency to have done. She felt that there was a gallantry in him, after all, and in this new phase he pleased her. Richard, on his side, felt humbly the same truth, and he began to respect himself. The past had closed abruptly behind him, and poor tardy Gertrude had been shut in. The future was dimly shaping itself without her image. So he did not open his arms.

" Good-bye," he said, holding out his hand. " I may not see you again for a long time."

Gertrude felt as if the world were deserting her. " Are you going away ? " she asked, tremulously.

" I mean to sell out and pay my debts, and go to the war."

She gave him her hand, and he silently shook it. There was no contending against the war, and she gave him up.

With their separation my story properly ends, and to say more would be to begin a new story. It is perhaps my duty, however, expressly to add that Major Luttrell, in obedience to a logic of his own, abstained from revenge ; and that, if time has not avenged him, it has at least rewarded him. General Luttrell, who lost an arm before the war was over, recently married Miss Van Winkel, of Philadelphia, and seventy thousand a year. Richard engaged in the defence of his country, with a commission in the Volunteers, obtained with much difficulty. He saw

a great deal of fighting, but he has no scars to show. The return of peace found him in his native place, without a home and without resources. One of his first acts was to call dutifully and respectfully upon Miss Whittaker, whose circle of acquaintance was now much enlarged, and included even people who came from Boston to stay with her. Gertrude's manner was kindness itself, but a more studied kindness than before. She had lost much of her youth and her simplicity. Richard wondered whether she had pledged herself to spinsterhood, but of course he didn't ask her. She inquired very particularly into his material prospects and intentions, and offered urgently to lend him money, which he declined to borrow. When he left her he took a long walk through her place and beside the river, and, wandering back to the days when he had yearned for her love, assured himself that no woman would ever again be to him what she had been. During his stay in this neighbourhood he became reconciled to one of the old agricultural magnates whom he had insulted in his unregenerate days, and through whom he was glad to obtain some momentary employment. But his present position is very distasteful to him, and he is eager to try his fortunes in the West. As yet, however, he has lacked the means to emigrate with advantage. He drinks no more than is good for him. To speak of Gertrude's impressions of Richard would lead us quite too far. Shortly after his return she broke up her household, and came to the bold resolution (bold, that is, for a woman young, unmarried, and ignorant of manners in her own country) to spend some time in Europe. At our last accounts she was living in the ancient city of Florence. Her great wealth, of which she was wont to complain that it excluded her from human sympathy, now affords her a most efficient protection. She passes

## POOR RICHARD

among her fellow-countrymen abroad for a very independent, but a very contented woman : although, as she is by this time nearly thirty years of age, some little romantic episode in the past is vaguely alluded to as accounting for her continued celibacy.

THE END









V  
PUBLIC LIBRARY OF BROOKLINE



3 1712 00068 7940

**WITHDRAWN**  
**PUBLIC LIBRARY**  
**BROOKLINE**

Public Library of Brookline, Mass.

MAIN LIBRARY  
361 Washington Street  
Brookline, Mass. 02146

**I M P O R T A N T**

Leave cards in pocket



